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THE X-FILES

CHRIS CARTER

WILLIAM B. DAVIS

CHRIS OWENS

EPISODE GUIDE

DEAN HAGLUND

LAURIE HOLDEN

VERONICA CARTWRIGHT

Volume 31 Number 8



ROBERT CONRAD VS. WILL SMITH
“WILD WILD WEST,” THEN AND NOW

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"The Magazine with a Sense of Wonder"

OCTOBER 1999

Welcome to our fifth annual issue devoted to THE X-FILES, as the show heads into its seventh and perhaps final season. Interviewed are creator, writer, producer Chris Carter, who talks about winding-up the series this year, as well as key members of its conspiracy cast, who shed light on the show's secretive inner workings. Files critic Paula Vitaris provides her analysis and episode guide of the just-completed sixth season and finds that in a year dubbed "X-FILES Lite," there were still a number of standout shows, including David Duchovny's own stunning writing and directing debut.

Carter seems to be hedging his bets about any chance for continuing the show another year after next. Though he isn't saying, it probably depends on how well his new series, HARSH REALM, plays on Fox, starting on Fridays in October. That's where X-FILES originally grew into a ratings champ for the fledgling Fox network, and it's where Carter's own followup, MILLENNIUM, withered on the vine. If REALM clicks, Fox can move it over to X-FILES vacant Sunday slot next year for more lucrative ratings returns. If it doesn't, we lose David Duchovny for sure, but Gillian Anderson, still under contract, could be back for an eighth season of X-FILES, minus Mulder. Carter says he's planning to wrap things up for the series' seventh season story arc, but with more X-FILES movies planned and the possibility of the show continuing, there doesn't seem much room for creative maneuvering or any real sense of closure. With expectations high, the coming year will be the biggest challenge for Carter in the series' history, to end on a high note amid so much uncertainty and the apparent need to play it safe.

On the movie front, we preview a host of late Summer and early Fall attractions and give WILD WILD WEST TV star Robert Conrad equal time to level blasts at the movie travesty of his fondly remembered series. It's also nice to see THE BLAIR WITCH PROJECT find its audience, following in the footsteps of THE X-FILES with its moody, gritty, realistic, low-tech approach to horror.

Frederick S. Clarke



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BOND IS BACK!

THE WORLD IS NOT ENOUGH (MGM)

The nineteenth James Bond movie recently finished shooting at London's Pinewood Studios. Its title taken from the Bond family's Scottish Coat of Arms mentioned in the book *On Her Majesty's Secret Service*, the film finds 007 protecting Elektra King, the beautiful daughter of an assassinated oil magnate, from the international terrorist Renard who sees the key to world domination in the pipelines of Baku, the oil-rich capital of Azerbaijan, which lies in a very dangerous and strategic military position. Pierce Brosnan (pictured) returns for the third time as the super suave super spy with French sensation Sophie Marceau as Elektra, Robert Carlyle (THE FULL MONTY) playing Renard and Denise Richards (STARSHIP TROOPERS) as nuclear weapons expert Dr. Christmas Jones. Robbie Coltrane also returns as Valentin Zukovsky, the part he played in GOLDENYE.

The director this time out is Michael Apted, acclaimed for such dramas as GORILLAS IN THE MIST and NELL. Apted remarked, "Pierce wanted a director who would accent the performances and make them a cohesive whole within the action. I'm inheriting a very successful franchise so I have to decide which elements to change, just a little, to keep the film fresh and modern. It's still escapism. It's still Bond. But now it will have a keen dramatic force, too."

Alan Jones

November 19



THE ADVENTURES OF ELMO IN GROUCHLAND (Columbia) October 1

Mandy Patinkin and Vanessa Williams co-star with the muppet TV characters in this co-production from CTW and Jim Henson Pictures. SEE PAGE 22

THE ASTRONAUT'S WIFE (NL) August 27

Charlize Theron and Johnny Depp star in this science fiction thriller, about a shuttle astronaut who returns to Earth a changed man. SEE PAGE 14.

DUDLEY DO RIGHT (Universal) Aug 27

Brendan Fraser stars in this live-action adaptation of the TV cartoon. SEE PAGE 8.

IRON GIANT (WB) Now playing

The workprint of this film (sans final music and credits) revealed a combo of American-animated antics and exciting anime-type action, with the latter finally winning out. The final version should be worth watching. SEE CFQ 31:7:16.

LOST SOULS (NL) October 8

Winona Ryder stars in this supernatural thriller about a diabolical conspiracy. D.P. Janusz Kaminski (SCHINDLER'S LIST) makes his directing debut. SEE PAGE 12.

MOLLY (MGM) Fall

The trailers announced a May release, but the film never showed up. Apparently, the studio didn't want the film to get lost in the wake of PHANTOM MENACE.

THE NINTH GATE (Artisan) Fall

A collector of rare books (Frank Langella) hires Johnny Depp to track down an obscure occult text, with an ancient curse that could threaten the world. Roman Polanski directed.

PRINCESS MONONOKE (Dimension) November

Hiroyo Miyazaki's anime-masterpiece is getting the typical treatment from Miramax: announce a release date, push it back. Let's hope the film comes out this time. SEE ANIMEFANTASTIQUE 1:3 cover story now on newsstands.

RELEASE SCHEDULE

Upcoming cinefantastique at a glance, along with a word or two for the discriminating viewer.

compiled by Steve Blodowski
(unless otherwise noted)



SCREAM IF YOU KNOW WHAT I DID LAST HALLOWEEN (Dimension)

October 15

The parody of teen SCREAM-fests hits theaters two months before Dimension's second SCREAM sequel.

THE SIXTH SENSE (BV)

Fall

Bruce Willis stars as a child psychologist whose patient is haunted by ghosts, in this thriller from writer-director M. Night Shyamalan (WIDE AWAKE).

A STIR OF ECHOES (Artisan) October 15

David Koepp's sophomore directing effort is an effective adaptation of Richard Matheson's eponymous novel, starring Kevin Bacon. SEE PAGE 60.

STIGMATA (MGM)

August 27

In this religious thriller, the Vatican dispatches a priest (Gabriel Byrne) to ascertain the validity of a case involving a woman (Patricia Arquette) suffering from wounds inflicted by an invisible attacker. SEE CFQ 31:7:54.

TALOS, THE MUMMY (Dimension) DTV

This rival mummy epic bypasses theaters in order to reach video shelves in time to capitalize on the success of Universal's summer hit. That's the official story, anyway; those who've seen the film suggest there might be other reasons. SEE CFQ 30:5/6:16.

TEACHING MRS. TINGLE (Dimension)

August 20

Kevin Williamson's directorial debut, about a confrontation between high school kids and a terrorizing teacher, underwent a title change (from KILLING MRS. TINGLE) in the wake of the shooting at Columbine High School.

THE 13TH WARRIOR (Touchstone)

August 13

An emissary (Antonio Banderas) joins a band of warriors in their battle with mysterious creatures legendary for consuming every living thing in their path. John McTiernan directed. From the novel by Michael Crichton.

UNIVERSAL SOLDIER: THE RETURN (Columbia)

August 20

Never mind the two made-for-cable sequels now out on video—original star Jean-Claude Van Damme returns in this theatrical sequel to the 1990 hit. SEE PAGE 16.

HEADLESS HORSEMAN

SLEEPY HOLLOW (Paramount)

Washington Irving's classic, "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow," is given the big-budget treatment thanks to fantasy maestro Tim Burton, who recently finished helming his lavish all-star version in Britain, on a stunning exterior set built from scratch in the English countryside, and in brilliantly Gothic interiors constructed at Leavesden Studios, the home of THE PHANTOM MENACE. Written by SEVEN-scribe Andrew Kevin Walker, and starring Johnny Depp, Christina Ricci, Miranda Richardson, Michael Gambon, Casper Van Dien, Jeffrey Jones, and Michael Gough, Burton's SLEEPY HOLLOW adds a sharp supernatural twist to the romance between Ichabod and local lovely Katrina Van Tassel, which is interrupted by a jealous rival disguising himself as a ghostly headless horseman. "I'm a big fan of the Hammer Horror films of the '50s and '60s," said Burton. "This script had a lot of that kind of classic, beautiful horror imagery. Our story is respectful of the original but takes it into a whole new fantasy area. Mario Bava's BLACK SUNDAY was a definite influence, too." Alan Jones

November 19

STAR WARS

THE PHANTOM MENACE

By Thomas Doherty

Heralded by truckloads of trinkets and predestined for box-office success of (near?) Titanic proportions, George Lucas' long, long-awaited prequel to his epochal space trilogy comes to earth with the impact of an overdue messiah, joyfully embraced by the faithful, eyed a bit more warily by the skeptics. After all, in the 16 years since Darth Vader last cleared his throat in RETURN OF THE JEDI, the STAR WARS franchise has shape shifted from a motion picture series into a religious cult, complete with blissed-out congregations of true believers, three worship services that perform the sacred text chapter and verse, and massive donations paid into church coffers for the holy icons. "There are definitely not enough answers in STAR WARS to constitute a religion," Lucas protested at a press conference prior to the May, 19, 1999 nativity, but if anyone thinks the religious metaphor is overblown, try blaspheming around the zealots and may the fatwa be with you.

Thus, to measure STAR WARS: EPISODE 1—THE PHANTOM MENACE by the usual critical yardsticks—artistic excellence, narrative drive, evocative characters, mind boggling CGI—is to ignore the very forces that have lifted the series into a unique stratosphere in motion picture history—and not just for the folks who resemble the guy who runs the comic book store in THE SIMPSONS. Being designated an instant cultural landmark, however, is not all cover stories and cable specials. Well before the 12:01 screenings on E-1-Day, the fog of publicity and expectation had already inspired a seesaw of premature backlash and self-defensive

How the movie series turned to religious cult.



Lucas, the new Pope. "There are not enough answers in STAR WARS to constitute a religion," he said, but just try blaspheming around the zealots.

counter-attack (waiting in the ticket line on opening day, the fashion-averse teenagers in front of me scornfully declared, "We're here to see THE MUMMY"). No question: the rich cosmology that propels the series also weighs it down. Even upon first viewing, watching the new STAR WARS was fated to be a retrospective experience, perceived through the filters of the post-quels from 1977, 1980, and 1983 (that's R2D2! C-3PO without body armor! Jabba the Hut on Weightwatchers!) and the backstory (or is it frontstory?) of what we all know comes afterward in the dramaturgy. To appreciate the latest installment straight on, best to remember Alfred Hitchcock's advice to a nervous actress ("It's only a movie, Ingrid") and to try to imagine a time long, long ago, before George Lucas transformed

Joseph Campbell's *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* into the Franchise with a Million Ancillary Marketing Opportunities.

First, the good news, much of which is summed up in the name "Liam Neeson." Who would have thought Neeson would be so much better as a Jedi than a Nazi? As Qui-Gon Jinn, the Irish actor commands the emotional center of the film, and whatever Lucas paid him, it was not enough. In a tale that is wafer thin on fully realized, flesh and blood characters (whether of the DNA or CGI variety) Neeson brings a serene, sure-footed patriarchal authority to his role as Jedi mentor. Almost singlehandedly, he keeps the film from spiraling into a narrative sinkhole.

The second best special effect, of course, is the CGI. Thanks to St. George and the

wizards at ILM, the fresh brushstrokes that can now be applied to the canvas of cinema are nothing less than astonishing. ILM isn't state of the art; it stretches beyond the state of the art. In terms of pure spectatorship, E-1 is awash in subtle touches and background details that fans will delight in upon repeated viewings and freeze-framed scrutiny. (Look for the witty E.T. homage in the galactic legislature.) CGI vistas as marvelous as anything put on screen unspool with each new scene change, a spectacular new sight after each old-fashioned wipe: otherworldly skylines, oceanic netherworlds, alien armies clashing on vast battlefields. For design inspiration, ILM has drawn on a rich catalogue of visual references, from the cavernous Krell boiler rooms in FORBIDDEN PLANET to the chariot race in BEN-HUR. Not incidentally, the ready-to-war CGI "battle droids" make kid-friendly stand-ins for the Imperial Storm Troopers, allowing slice-and-dice violence without the nasty aftertaste of human victims. On the downside, the CGI backdrops are sometimes cluttered and busy, and the dialogue mix, especially for the CGI characters, is murky. But even nitpicking is a tribute to the skill of the magic makers. To say, for example, that the digital creation Jar Jar Binks (voiced by Ahmed Best) is an annoying character is to underscore how fluidly the CGI fabrications are integrated into the human ensemble.

Actually, the humans are consistently outclassed by the CGI scenery and synthetics. Admittedly beset with underwritten roles, the rest of the cast is dim and pallid—with the significant exception of the hooded, tattooed, and horned Darth

Maul (Ray Park), who, despite his Worldwide Wrestling Federation appearance, is a magnetic personification of the dark side. Though widely touted in pre-release PR, Ewan McGregor as the young Obi-Won is very much a junior partner; he is easily overpowered—in screen voltage if not light saber moves—by Darth Maul. Encased in more restrictive costuming and white pancake makeup than Kate Blanchett in *ELIZABETH*—or Elsa Lanchester in *BRIDE OF FRANKENSTEIN* for that matter—Queen Amidala (Natalie Portman) is a stilted figure in her regal mode, and only slightly more animated playing her own handmaiden. Shim Skywalker (Pernilla August), the emotionally detached mother of the golden child, functions mainly as a necessary biological fact, escorted off screen at first opportunity. Obviously, the feminine principle has never been strong in Lucasland, but Carrie Fisher's spunky Princess Leia held her own against the boys and, thanks to the kinky tastes of Jabba the Hut, injected some welcome sexiness into an all too chaste series. Were Jeri Ryan to sashay by in her Star Fleet spandex, she'd discombobulate this whole galaxy.

If the skeptics have to marvel at the technical wonders in *E-1*, the acolytes cannot deny that as a work of drama, it is a deeply flawed film; not a travesty, to be sure, but hardly the kind of miracle likely to spark a revival among the infidels.

Ray Park as Darth Maul, a magnetic personification of the dark side, despite his Wrestling Federation look.



Waiting in the ticket line on opening day, the fashion-averse teenagers in front of me scornfully declared, "We're here to see THE MUMMY."



Jake Lloyd and Ewan McGregor, with Liam Neeson (l) whose sure-footed patriarchal authority keeps the film from spiraling into a narrative sinkhole.

"The kid is bad" was the early, almost fearful word of mouth on the Internet. He is. As the young Anakin Skywalker, Jake Lloyd is a charmless performer and his bland line readings and one-note expressions make you yearn for (words I never thought would escape from my word processor) the devilish charm and alert intelligence of the pre-pubescent Macaulay Culkin. The family-oriented Lucas, say Hollywood insiders, "pitched the film too young," but it isn't just a matter of demographics. Even assuming some halfpint Laurence Olivier could redeem the treacly kid stuff, the problem with Anakin is that he is, in fact, too old. Another in a long dreary line of Hollywood brats who embody the Puritan ideal of the child, Anakin is a miniature adult. At age ten, he is a fully formed, mature personality: assured, eloquent, a brilliant scientist and an expert mechanic. Equally skilled in the arts of flight and war, the kid pilots not one but two high-speed vehicles to victory and glory. He's not precocious; he's preposterous. Okay, as "the Chosen One," he has an astonishingly high midi-

chlorian count and all that, but at any moment one expects him to saunter into a casino and order a martini, shaken not stirred. When the dying Qui-Gon Jinn extracts a promise from Obi-Won that he teach the boy the Jedi ethos, you think—teach him what? Acting?

Which gets to the real reason *E-1* is, alas, an emphatically two-star *STAR WARS*. Lucas forgot the words of his own Jedi master, the literary criticism of Joseph Campbell (Yoda to his Luke), on the adventures of mythic heroes from Aeneas to Gautama Sakyamuni. The dramatic arc of separation-initiation-return and the emotional pull of father-son relationships served as the spine of the original triad. The tutelage of the young Luke Skywalker traced the development of a callow youngster moving into maturity, learning to temper courage with wisdom and to sacrifice self for a greater cause. For all the talk of masters and apprentices in *E-1*, precious little instruction and education takes place here. Crucially, too, Luke was a youngster, not a child: his passage was to adulthood. In an age of broken families and absent Dads, *STAR*

WARS soared on the palpable need of young males for patriarchal authority and nurturing taskmasters. No amount of eye-popping CGI can compensate for this lack of mythic heart. Contrary to popular belief, SF fans are not technophiles—again and again, they accept the cheesiest, sub-Ed Wood caliber FX if the tale grips and characters kick-in. How could Lucas, who if he did not write the book, certainly read the book, have lost sight of the real force that fueled his series?

A last comment on more earth-bound matters: the subtextual ethnic shadings of the extraterrestrials are more than a bit discomforting. The sinister Trade Federation types seem to be surrogates for the Japanese (economic imperialists with funny accents) while the Gungans, the sub-surface dwellers of the Naboo planet, evoke African stereotypes (the bloated tribal leader and the lanky Jar Jar Binks, spouting patois like a CGI version of Chris Tucker). With the white Northern Europeans and the fair-haired boy Skywalker as masters of the universe, E-1 may re-ignite complaints of a lily-white racial wheel spinning in the Lucasfilm galaxy, Samuel L. Jackson's seat on the Jedi council notwithstanding.

In the end, how you feel about the latest episode in the gospel according to Lucas will depend not just on how you feel about the *STAR WARS* series but about your attitude to SF films generally. SF tastes tend to diverge along two main roads: PG and R, soft-hearted and hard-boiled, utopian and dystopian, aliens with acid blood and ETs with cute eyes. The *STAR WARS* and *STAR TREK* franchises define the former tradition, films like *BLADE RUNNER*, *ALIEN*, and *THE MATRIX* represent the latter. The very elements in *E-1* that make younger viewers swoon are liable to make teenagers and adults gag. Perhaps, given the lineage, it was only to be expected that *STAR WARS: EPISODE I—THE PHANTOM MENACE* would have limited appeal to anyone over the age of 30; what is surprising, and disappointing, is that it has so little that will appeal to anyone over the age of ten. □

Crimes of the Future

David Cronenberg on his Paramount deal and an unrealized pet project, RED CARS.

By Alan Jones

What do a 1961 motor racing scandal, Jean-Paul Sartre's existentialist tract *Being and Nothingness*, dream sequences featuring mutilation and dwarfism, and the Ferrari family have in common? The answer is they are all part and parcel of the film David Cronenberg was due to make before he got sidetracked by *eXistenZ*.

Again written by the Canadian genius, *RED CARS* tells the extraordinary part fact/part fiction tale of Grand Prix racing driver Phil Hill, the Italian racing community's World Champion hope, who thinks his sponsor, multimillionaire Enzo Ferrari, favors teammate Count Von Trips (whose actual nickname was Count Von Crash in an ironic nod to Cronenberg's last controversial offering) for the accolade more than him. How this pathological conviction manifests itself in dream imagery and is juggled with Laura Ferrari trying to find out the identity of her husband's illegitimate son (she's terrified their sickly son Dino will disappear from the family tree in shame as a result) leads to incredible tragedy and—could it be?—a miracle.

Think *FAST COMPANY* meets *RABID* and you've hit the concept nail on the head with *RED CARS* which covers typical Cronenberg territory while being set on the Monaco/Zandvoort/Monza glamour sports circuit. Beginning with a clammy dream sequence in which Enzo Ferrari shrinks to baby size and biting Hill on the arm when he tries to pick him



Jude Law and Jennifer Jason Leigh in Cronenberg's *eXistenZ*.
Inset: Working for Scott Rudin on an original idea for Paramount.



up, this unusual—even for the warped director—Cronenbergian nightmare also features a sequence where Hill amputates his own foot with a buzz-saw after thinking it's too weak to press down hard on the accelerator pedal.

The reason why the film hasn't been made yet is because the Ferrari family has made their displeasure over the project very well known to the director and the fact that Goldcrest Films, who owned the property, had the hardest time trying to raise the proposed \$40 million it would take to do it proper justice location-wise. Perhaps after the respectable critical acclaim and boxoffice that has greeted *eXistenZ*, the situation might change.

Cronenberg is remaining circumspect about his highly personalized view of the scandal

but he's cautiously optimistic about it eventually reaching the screen. "*RED CARS* was with Goldcrest but they basically blew it by letting the Ferrari family read it," he said. "They were really upset which was strange because I'm only dealing with facts that are common knowledge and were well-documented at the time. The extent to which lawyers and accountants control the business is really quite deep. I'm not saying anything about team leader Phil Hill that's particularly negative and in contemporary interviews he talked about the scandal. But he sees himself as a more heroic character and doesn't want to be shown vomiting before races and stuff like that. It was true so I don't think he could sue me."

Noted Cronenberg, "The Ferrari logo is a real issue too. I could invent that stuff as people

have done in the past but it sort of defeats the purpose. Everyone in Italy knows that Piero Ferrari was well known as the bastard son of Ferrari and adopted by him to legitimize their relationship. Yet when he read the script, he became sidetracked by the visual device I used of having his mother featured in nightmare sequences. I now think the script was badly translated by his advisors so he didn't get the true gist of what I was saying."

What does seem likely to be Cronenberg's next film is *CRIMES OF THE FUTURE* for Paramount Pictures. If that sounds familiar, it's because it shares the same title with the director's early

ly 1970 underground offering—itself a close companion piece to his debut *STEREO* (1969). The first *CRIMES OF THE FUTURE* dealt with deadly cosmetics wiping out the female race. The second? "Don't ask me why I've done this," said Cronenberg. "I just like the title and not too many people have seen the original. I have a contract with producer Scott [SLEEPY HOLLOW] Rudin and Paramount to write an original script which I'm currently working on. For the sake of having a title as a record I called it *CRIMES OF THE FUTURE*. It's only confusing to my fans. I may be choosing it unconsciously because it is a revisiting of themes from the earliest part of my career. I don't know yet, I'm not too deeply into the script to know where I'm going with it." □

BRENDAN FRASER

DUDLEY DO-RIGHT

The versatile actor on fleshing out yet another Jay Ward cartoon fantasy.

By Joe Fordham

Meet GEORGE OF THE JUNGLE. Meet ENCINO MAN. Meet the tortured adolescent struggling to resolve anti-Semitic sentiment in his public school in WITH HONORS. Meet Clay, the lawn-mowing ex-Marine attempting to reconcile his own macho sensibilities and attitudes to love and death in the company of aging film director James Whale in GODS AND MONSTERS. Meet Rick O'Connell, romantic action hero of Universal Studio's high-tech remake of THE MUMMY. The impressive range and diversity of Brendan Fraser's roles have garnered the young actor the respect of critics, a broad audience appeal and a list of 15 films on his resumé to date—the latest of which is his portrayal of DUDLEY DO-RIGHT, his second incarnation of a '60s Jay Ward animated icon, which Universal opens August 27.

Fraser is as excited as anyone that Universal is also making a movie based on Jay Ward's classic, wacko cartoon duo ROCKY AND BULLWINKLE—even though he's not in it! As veteran now of two Ward flicks, Disney's 1997, \$100 million grosser GEORGE OF THE JUNGLE and Universal's DUDLEY DO-RIGHT, Fraser has kindly gone on record to offer his services to the ROCKY team. "I'm going to do craft services for it," he joked.

Fresh from his adventures wrassling mummies in the Moroccan desert for Universal's wham-bam remake of THE



Fraser and Sarah Jessica Parker as Nell, recreating the ambience of ROSE MARIE, Ward's inspiration for his '60s Saturday-morning cartoon spoof.

MUMMY, the normally soft-spoken Fraser lit up when recounting the most recent tales of Jay Ward's bumbling Royal Canadian Mountie. "Dudley is alive and well in Witsawana, Canada, with the diabolical Snidely Whiplash played by Alfred Molina," Fraser proclaimed. "By the way, between you and me and all the readers of *Cinefantastique*, Alfred Molina is the real star of DUDLEY DO-RIGHT. He's wonderful! A killer moustache-twiddling performance. Hilarious! He's just... diabolical!"

In his pursuit of Snidely—"the worst bad guy ever!"—Dudley also encounters "the worst bad guy gang ever." With Sarah Jessica Parker rounding out the cast—ho, ho!—as Dudley's damsel in distress, Nell Fenwick, and Robert Prosky playing the now-retired Inspector Fenwick, everyone punned

and japed from a screenplay by Hugh Wilson, under the direction of Australian Scott Hicks (SHINE).

For those technically inclined, Fraser noted that his steed in the film, Horse, was given a little CGI enhancement to make "his eyeballs a little bit funnier and cuter, but there's not a whole lot you can teach a horse to do," he laughed, still somewhat delirious at the memory of the shoot. "Sometimes you get lucky, as we did in this film; although I think a few supernatural events actually occurred to help Horse with his performance, like the time we tried to get him to talk and another time I had to get him to bite my ear off with a carrot in my pocket. He runs away, you know, because things go really bad for Dudley. He loses his job, he loses his horse, he loses his outpost, he loses his girl and

he has a moment of self-realization, as pointed out by Eric Idle, who plays the Prospector."

This retelling of the Dudley legend bends the myth a bit for the post-T2, butt-kick-hungry audience. Fraser concurred: "Dudley gets a motorcycle and a machine gun and starts kicking butt. We've catapulted him into the '90s." Modern day accoutrements aside, Fraser kept his own chin for his venture into the ultimate in square-jawed heroism. "It was prominently displayed as best as I could." The movie has turned out as "a real merry romp," he said, inspired just as much by MGM's classic melodrama ROSE MARIE—the original source of all the merriment for Jay Ward's cartoon capers back in 1963—as by the cartoon itself.

"ROSE MARIE was a favorite film of Hugh Wilson's," Fraser noted. "We even recreated a couple of dance numbers that are a direct knock-off of the old MGM classic, with Indians and pigs in dinner theatre costumes." This was not the first time that Wilson had coaxed a dance performance from his nimble star, the first being Fraser's hot-foot swing session with Alicia Silverstone in BLAST FROM THE PAST." Fraser laughed at the experience, "Hugh now likes to boast that I am the only guy in Hollywood who can actually do all that stuff I list on the bottom of my resumé."

Fraser promised a marked difference between DUDLEY DO-RIGHT and its live-action predecessor GEORGE OF THE JUNGLE as a result of the



With Parker and Alfred Molina as the villainous Snidely Whiplash, who Fraser dubs as the film's real star in "a killer moustache-twirling performance."

studios attached. Whereas GEORGE was Disney, DUDLEY is Universal, produced by John Davis, Joseph Singer and J. Todd Harris, the team responsible for Eddie Murphy's recent, bawdy reincarnation of DOCTOR DOOLITTLE. "The two films are worlds apart," Fraser noted, "although they were both inspired by the same guru, Jay Ward. GEORGE was an effects-heavy film that really required that support to create a jungle man who could swing through trees and smash into them without killing himself and still look funny. With DUDLEY DO-RIGHT we have focused more on the spirit of what Jay Ward presented in terms of genre satire, digging social commentary and subversive humor. I know for a fact that the Ward family is supportive and Ramona—who now runs her late father's business—is definitely a big fan of the film. I think DUDLEY carries on the torch of being in the spirit of Jay Ward's clever qualities."

Fans of the original series can also rest assured that the indispensable trademark breathless, earnest narration that informed all the cartoons also fea-

tures in the DUDLEY plan. "Bill Scott normally did the voice of the heroes," Fraser explained. "He did the original voice of George and Bullwinkle, and he did the voice of Dudley. If you listen to them back-to-back, they're really all the same; the reason being, as the family have told me since we've become quite close, they would write a script on a Tuesday, then on Thursday they would get together and read it over and over, just having fun with it, so by next Monday they'd have it finished and start again on the next. It was like

Fraser with Indian Chief Alex Rocco. His turn as Do-Right follows his star-making role as Ward's GEORGE OF THE JUNGLE, and horror hit THE MUMMY.



"I find it fascinating that I'm an actor in the middle of a huge machine," said Brendan Fraser. "I love the challenge of choosing the moment for the effect."

doing little playlets all the time, there was an atmosphere like summer stock theatre, they were all playing the same part but in a different play."

In keeping with the grooving, no-rules Ward experience, the movie version of DUDLEY throws dramatic convention aside in favor of sometimes painfully cheap laughs. "Now and then we even have the Narrator and break the fourth wall, like we did in GEORGE," laughed Fraser. "At one point we even had the bad guys argue with the Narrator and he got mad and punished them." Anything goes in the Jay-rated world.

In many ways, Somers' proposed style for his vision of THE MUMMY seemed tailor-made for Fraser, allowing him to mine his natural sense of humor while simultaneously thrusting him into his first full-fledged action role. "I love the process of filmmaking," Fraser emphasized. "I find it fascinating that I'm an actor in the middle of a huge machine. It kind of gives me a front row seat. I love the challenge of doing my part, of choosing the moment for the effect you want. Technical things really don't matter in the end. It's just an actor and an audience, and it's just a job that I am thrilled to be in a position to take."

Now firmly established as A-

list acting talent, Fraser has found success has brought its own rewards in terms of the availability of projects. "To tell the truth, I'm finding fewer scripts are coming my way, just better ones. It's cutting out the fat." Undoubtedly one recent example of a higher quality project was GODS AND MONSTERS, Bill Condon's adaptation of Christopher Bram's novel *Father of Frankenstein*.

"The script was sent to me as 'Untitled piece, starring Ian McKellan'—that got my interest," Fraser remarked. "It was a compelling story set in old Hollywood about beginning life and leaving life, about fathers and sons, about creation and the metaphysical state, about the relationship between master and mentor, and it ultimately showed us how very human we are. It also incorporated the world of one of my favorite films of the genre, the classic BRIDE OF FRANKENSTEIN."

Although GODS AND MONSTERS and THE MUMMY are poles apart in their depictions of two classic horror icons, the projects can very loosely be seen to share a common bond in the sense that they are both examples of Hollywood's ability to reinvent itself. "I think, in a way, it's nostalgia and revisionist history," Fraser observed. "So much has happened this century and along the way these characters have given us guideposts. When the yuppies say they remember GEORGE OF THE JUNGLE, it gives them a real strong reference point to help us try and remember where we have come from as we look towards the new millennium; and I think there's enough difference between what these stories were then and what they are now that we can reconceive them. I don't think it's just a matter of Hollywood recycling characters." □



Boreanaz as age-old vampire Angel, akin to Lon Chaney's WOLFMAN, cursed to harm the one he cares for the most, leaves Buffy to save her and strikes out for L.A. Right: Charisma Carpenter as Cordelia, now Angel's girl Friday.



ANGEL, VA

David Boreanaz on the

By Mitch Persons

He has been chosen one of the 50 Most Beautiful People by *People Magazine*. On TV, he has portrayed Angel the vampire, the confidante, lover, and sometime tormentor of Sarah Michelle Gellar's character of Buffy Summers in **BUFFY THE VAMPIRE SLAYER**. Now, broodingly handsome David Boreanaz is to be the star



of the **BUFFY** spin-off, the WB Network's **ANGEL** (Tues, 9-10 PM, PST.)

These events could have turned Boreanaz into an insufferable egotist. Indeed, he already possesses attributes of which snobbery is made: he is intelligent, articulate, and well-read. But even when he is mulling over intellectual matters, there is absolutely no trace of haughtiness in the man.

Boreanaz's affable, down-to-earth demeanor is shared by the co-executive producer of the show, David Greenwalt, who also produced **BUFFY** in association with creator Joss Whedon. So amiable are the two men that sitting down and talking to them is not unlike the experience of sharing a table at a donut shop

with two old high school chums.

"I'm reading *Tae te ching* right now," said Boreanaz, "which is a Chinese Taoist book of notes that was supposed to have been written by the philosopher Lao Tzu. The book is filled with words of wisdom, very beautiful, very reflective. I'm into that kind of thing because I'm always interested in finding out what this so-called 'mystery of life' is all about, but," he said with a chuckle, "I never can find it, so after I finish a book like this, life is still as much of a mystery as it was before. There's that same kind of ambiguity in the character of Angel. He is a creature who doesn't really understand why he is here. He's possessed by demons, but he also has a good side to him, and there is a constant tussle between these two forces for prominence."

"A lot of **ANGEL**," noted producer David Greenwalt, "deals with how Angel relates to this dark, dangerous, and sometimes glamorous world of Los Angeles. This is a city of law firms, and talent agencies, and gangsters, all very real, and at times extremely unsettling."

"We first dealt with unsettling issues in some episodes of **BUFFY THE VAMPIRE SLAYER**. Among them was 'Nightmares,' which showed the horrors of child abuse, and 'Ted,' which portrayed domestic violence. While these and other episodes got favorable critical and public response, we're going to keep those kinds of shows at a minimum on **ANGEL**. I find that if I look at a story as being a polemic of some sort, then I'm dead and I'm on a soapbox trying to preach about it. However, I do look at the passions and instincts of man—and wom-

EMPIRE PRIVATE EYE

Fall premiere of the WB's new *Buffy* spin-off.

ankind—that once loose, can destroy us. In normal life, my inner demons might make me cheat on my wife, go get drunk, do things I shouldn't do. The wonderful thing about working in a genre show is that I can make my demons literal. Just think for a moment about L.A. There's the quest for eternal youth and beauty in this town, people who will do anything to stay young forever. Then there's the incredible divide between have's and have-not's. The rich definitely live above the poor, and sometimes off the poor. You add demonology to that, and you've automatically got these great issues. And right in the middle of it all is Angel, a vampire with a soul, perhaps more of a soul than most of the people in the city."

Noted Boreanaz, "When Angel first arrives in L.A., he's taken aback by being close to so many people, and he knows that if he does get close to people, they will get hurt if he cares about them. It takes another individual to show him that he is worthy and he has a potential to save lives. That individual helps him set up a service, sort of a private investigation agency to rid the town of demons."

"The individual," Greenwalt said, "is a character named Doyle, who is played by Glenn Quinn. He's half human and half demon. He plays a most important part as a messenger for the powers of light and darkness, and also serves as Angel's sidekick, conscience, and muse."

"Another regular on the show is an alumnus from *BUFFY*, Charisma Carpenter's character of Cordelia Chase. In *ANGEL*, Cordelia is a girl who is running away from her own unhappy life, and happens to link up with Angel, as kind of a girl Friday in his agency."



Boreanaz and Carpenter with Glenn Quinn as Doyle (r), a half human and half demon who sets up Angel as a private eye to rid L.A. of its many demons.

"I think," Boreanaz added, "that Cordelia will be able to help Angel not only as his assistant, but as a person who provides him with a resilience that he does not possess. In turn, Angel will act as a bolster for Cordelia's faltering ego. I don't think the relationship will develop into a romantic one. Cordelia is so much of a Looney Tune, I believe that their association will be more aggravating than amorous."

Boreanaz noted he doesn't want to soft-peddle Angel's potential for evil. "I am delving very deeply into the character of Angel," he said. "David Greenwalt, and our other executive producer, *BUFFY*'s creator Joss Whedon, have allowed me to push the buttons as much as I would like. Of course, I would have liked to have pushed them much more as far as the evil side of Angel is concerned. I've actually lived that drastic side and I've gone down to that brooding, depressed, psychologically painful side. What I'm trying to learn about Angel now and especially what I would like

to take into this new series is the ability to integrate the good and bad sides, but in a more subtle way than they were portrayed in *BUFFY*.

"I think it's important for people to realize that Angel can tap into his malicious side and use it positively, rather than destructively. The suffering that he goes through, rather than moping and brooding about, he can act on. The pain rushes through him, and he feels malevolent, and he feels that malevolence creep up on him, and in the past he was forced to suffocate it. He can now use it in a way that's positive. This is what I want to bring to the series, a character that could go both ways, that can play both kinds of faces, yet not go emotionally off the deep end."

"I am discovering something about this character with every script that I get, and it amazes me how some things work, and some things don't work, and I think I learn more from the things that don't work. I kind of go for this character in a new light, on all different levels, and

see where he takes me. Sometimes when I can't pull the emotion out, or when I feel like I want to get to a certain state of mind, and I can't get there, then I struggle through it, and I somehow get through it, and I move on. I have the ultimate respect for writers and the telling of their words. I understand their beats and their points, and how to play specific scenes, but at times it's exhausting work. The reward for the work, though, is tremendous when I realize I've reached another level with this character.

"A level that David didn't mention here," interjected Greenwalt, "is that in addition to the morose, tormented Angel, this time we also have an Angel with a sense of humor. In fact, all our characters, and all of our situations, have a dosage of dark, unexpected humor. *ANGEL* is almost like a *film noir* with a few giggles thrown in."

"One of the problems with a lot of TV shows is that if you are doing a drama, you go into it with an attitude of 'Oh, we're turgid, we're earnest, we're crying' and most comedies are 'We're laughing now.' The really good dramas and comedies have a lot of each in them, one minute you're laughing, and then you see somebody hit by a bus, laughing at you, stuff like that."

"That is what happened with *BUFFY*," resumed Boreanaz, "The horror and the drama and the tension were relieved with real comedy. And Buffy herself was always her own worst enemy, at least verbally. She was always making jokes about herself and her powers and her role as The Slayer. Angel is going to be the same way—he's good personified, he's evil personified, but he's also kind of funny."

Lost Souls

Spielberg cinematographer Janusz Kaminski helms demonic possession tale.

By Douglas Eby

Meg Ryan's Prufrock Pictures is producing *LOST SOULS*, a New Line release set for October 8. Commented Ryan's partner Nina Sadowsky, "We thought the time was right for an upscale supernatural thriller. While dealing with supernatural themes, the movie is grounded in reality and has two complex leading characters that audiences can readily identify with: a young woman who has true religious faith, and a man whose circumstances have rendered him a complete skeptic."

Those characters are, respectively, Maya Larkin (Winona Ryder), a teacher at a parochial grade school, and attorney Peter Kelson, who is also a noted investigative journalist, often covering sensational murder trials (Ben Chaplin). Assisting at an exorcism of an institutionalized murderer, Larkin is given a coded message from the killer that there is a conspiracy to enable the devil to walk the Earth in human form, and that Kelson is the target human. She has to break through his ingrained skepticism and help him defeat the powers of evil before his 33rd birthday, one of several references to "powers of three" significance in the story, written by the team of Betsy Stahl and Pierce Gardner, who are also executive producing.

The cast includes Sarah Wynter, Elias Koteas, John Beasley, Leslie Stefanson, John Diehl, W. Earl Brown, and John Hurt and Philip Baker Hall (both of whom portray priests).



Winona Ryder as Maya Larkin, a teacher at a parochial grade school faced with diabolical evil, new age horror produced by Meg Ryan's Prufrock Pictures.

Debuting as director is cinematographer Janusz Kaminski (*SCHINDLER'S LIST*; *AMISTAD*, etc.), who noted he loves "the genre of the thriller. This one happens to have supernatural elements, like some of my favorite movies: *REPULSION*, *THE EXORCIST* and *ROSEMARY'S BABY*."

Referring to Prufrock's interests in material about "spiritual crisis and rebirth," Sadowsky noted, "People seem to have such incredible need for a religious spiritual life, but nowadays we tend to ridicule those who have true faith; it seems cultish to us, or old-fashioned. Our world is increasingly scientific and rational, which doesn't allow for God or miracles or anything inexplicable. When Meg and I heard the story pitch by Betsy and Pierce, we knew we had the right elements for an

exciting contemporary thriller that affirmed spirituality."

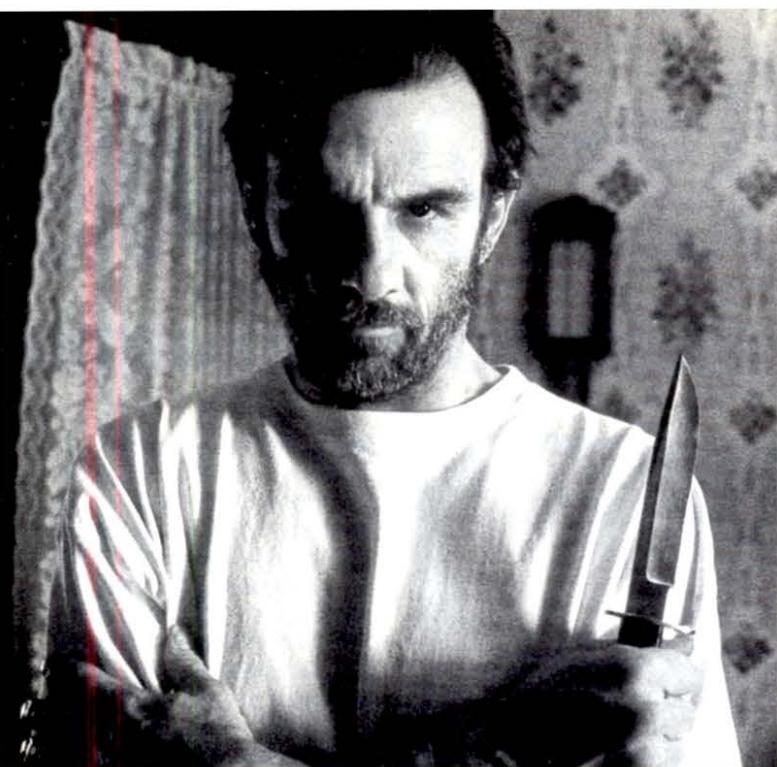
Background material that influenced the two writers included works by M. Scott Peck, M.D.; a book about real exorcisms, written by a former Jesuit priest; and movies such as *THE SHINING* and director Kaminski's picks. One of the central themes of the story is the conflict between skeptical rationalism and faith, as writer Stahl noted about the main characters: "Peter represents the 'everyman,' the guy on the street who has little or no use for religious faith. Maya is a woman of great religious conviction who must struggle every day to maintain her faith in the face of a world that ridicules or diminishes her beliefs."

Stahl admits to some changes in her own reactions to this kind of material: "In my own beliefs, I would say I'm more like Peter,

but in doing the research for this story, I began to believe in the possibility of a supernatural world." As for lead Winona Ryder, she commented in a recent newspaper interview: "My mother is a Buddhist and my father is an avowed atheist, so I guess you can say I'm trying to figure out where I stand with God. I'm still very nebulous, but I know that there is no devil. *LOST SOULS* is pure fiction as far as I'm concerned."

Ryder also noted in a TV magazine show interview that this material "touches on things that I'm not sure where I stand on in my own life. Things—God and faith—that I think when you're in your 20s you're sort of still figuring out where you stand. So in the film I play a woman of devout faith. A woman who really believes in God and the devil, and it's very far from where I am at in my life. I certainly believe in energies and stuff like that, but I don't believe in the devil."

One of the key elements in the story involves belief in the reality of the devil, and the depiction of an exorcism. The production company employed an official consultant, Father James LeBar, who was appointed in 1996 as one of four exorcists for the Archdiocese of New York. Until 1983, there was supposedly an exorcist for every diocese in the country. Father LeBar has noted, "The number of exorcisms we have actually done is very few. Last year, between the four of us, we did slightly more than 20. In this country, we reserve exor-



John Diehl, the Institutionalized killer who holds the key to a coded message that reveals a conspiracy to allow the Devil to walk the Earth in human form.

cism only for those who have a problem for which there is no medical, psychological or psychiatric answer." Added LeBar, "Evil is real and the angels that fell and disobeyed God are really doing things to harm people."

In one of the background sources for the screenplay, *People of the Lie: The Hope for Healing Human Evil*, author Scott Peck writes: "In common with 99 percent of psychiatrists and the majority of clergy, I did not think the devil existed... It occurred to me that if I could see one good old-fashioned case of possession I might change my mind." He goes on to say he decided "to go out and look for a case" and that "referrals trickled in. The first two cases turned out to be suffering from standard psychiatric disorders... The third case turned out to be the real thing." Dr. Peck doesn't provide a description of what he witnessed, but obviously shares Father LeBar's conviction in the reality of Satan.

Before developing the script, Gardner admitted he had "just a shallow, surface knowledge" of exorcism, but then started doing research, which he says "scared me more than any King book or anything I've read." The journal that author Blatty used in developing THE EXORCIST, Gardner noted, "was written by priests, and they have no ulterior motive. Even though they have

ostensibly bought into this phenomenon, here they have a real kid in front of them. The kid had no memory of his experience, and would go to sleep and then wake up at 11 or 12 o'clock, speaking in tongues, levitating, and just horrible stuff, and it scared the priests to death. And I read what Scott Peck wrote about [that third case] being 'the real thing.' When I read that on the page, I got a chill. He sensed something in that room that made him petrified, something bigger and stronger, some eternal force, not just the rantings of a schizophrenic or delusional person."

Gardner said that in school he was voted "class heretic" because, like everyone else, I was only paying lip service to big

Priest John Hurt presides over Diehl's exorcism in *LOST SOULS*, an "upscale supernatural thriller" which New Line Cinema opens nationwide October 8.



PRODUCER NINA SADOWSKY

"**Evil can take many forms, and be a really tricky thing to identify and deal with. A lot of times, you see good and evil very balanced in the same character.**"

questions of life and death. It was like get up, get your homework done, think about a date this weekend. And yet, supposedly, we're going to spend millions of years somewhere else, and I was always interested in that, but I was voted 'heretic' because I thought that the dogma of religion seemed too obviously arbitrary, and completely the invention of each culture. But, underneath it all, I was always fascinated with the idea that there's a bigger battle going on, and you're not even allowed to be neutral. C. S. Lewis said that there is no neutral ground in the universe, every split second and every square inch is contested by God, and counter-claimed by Satan."

Gardner revealed the movie includes a number of "disquieting, supernatural incidents... little moments where reality kind of slips, and things happen that bend the rules a bit. We shot a scene where Peter, our protagonist, is in a police station looking through a two-way mirror at a prisoner who claims to be demonically possessed. For the prisoner, it's a mirror, and Ben [Chaplin] is staring at him, and the guy comes up to the mirror and looks right at him. Our thought was to bring [our cast] to the point where they really don't want to believe something this

bad is happening, and when they find out it is happening, it's much worse than they thought, and they're cut off from any hope of redemption. It's too late; the cards have been dealt. What's been fun is watching Janusz [Kaminski] and the actors."

The various expressions of evil in the film is something producer Sadowsky also finds very interesting: "What is evil?" she asked. "Is it something that manifests itself in an individual? Is it an external force that possesses someone? I think evil comes in a lot of guises. We have some that are really overt, and people that are seemingly good and kind, who are evil. That's one of the themes of the film, that evil can take many forms, and be a really tricky thing to identify and deal with. A lot of times, you see good and evil very balanced in the same character."

Another character in the film is crime journalist Kelson's girlfriend, played by Sarah Wynter (*SPECIES II*). According to a *Hollywood Reporter* item, she complicates matters by attempting to help the conspiracy along and turning her boyfriend to the devil. The story promises to have a number of such turns, according to the writers. Gardner is very enthusiastic about what Kaminski has been getting on film: "We have seen in dailies all this amazing stuff. I think your readers will have a lot of fun, because they'll be watching, and then things will start to drift just a little off to the side of reality."

Sadowsky said the company "obviously watched a lot of movies in this genre before we started to shoot, and I think [Kaminski's] whole approach is 'Let people feel unnerved, let them feel unsettled, make them feel they're watching something that should make them uncomfortable, and therefore questioning and involved.'" □

THE ASTRONAUT'S

All-star update of I MARRIED A MONSTER

By Douglas Eby

The story for THE ASTRONAUT'S WIFE, writer/director Rand Ravich noted, was one that he developed while generating ideas for another project a couple of years ago: "I was trying to think of interesting ways of coming here [to Earth] from somewhere else. If you wanted to come from another world and take over, what would be a new, cool way to do it. And I came up with this idea of a race that sends kind of an electronic spy to take over the body of a Shuttle astronaut who's working on a satellite. The idea seemed too cool to make it just a minor character in another script, and then the more I started thinking about him, the more I was thinking that the really interesting character would be his wife. And that's someone, a human, I could know, whereas I certainly have no idea what an alien is." New Line Cinema opens Ravich's film nationwide August 27.

Ravich emphasized that the story is "all about the wife, Jillian Armacost, played by Charlize Theron, and about 'never being sure who your husband is, or your lover, or your other. And, hopefully, we're never sure for quite a while.' The husband, Spencer Armacost, played by Johnny Depp, has an accident in space and comes back changed. Noted Ravich, "It's more about doubt, and the characters. There are so few good roles for women, and I was really flattered that there were a lot of really good actresses who stepped up and expressed interest in the part."

His final choice for the key role of Jillian, Ravich noted, was an easy decision: "As soon as I sat down with Charlize, af-



Rand Ravich directs Charlize Theron in his own script, which echoes the 1958 B-movie, as the titular Theron finds herself menaced by her alien-possessed husband.

ter two minutes, it was just her. It was a combination of beauty, intelligence, a kind of old-fashioned movie star grace that you don't see anymore. But also, her accessibility. It was fantastic. And she's really easy on the eyes," he added. "And she has this amazing neck. There are all these outtakes of people putting their hand on the back of her neck. Every character eventually came around to it. They couldn't help themselves."

Ravich has credits as writer for THE MAKER, and CANDYMAN: FAREWELL TO THE FLESH. ASTRONAUT'S WIFE is his directorial debut, and he noted "the happiest days of my life were during production. I had an amazing crew. Everyone was fantastic. Johnny and Charlize—I could not have been blessed with a better cast. Directing is a huge process, and stretching over a long period of time. I've been a writer for 15 years, and could set my own schedule. But I loved doing this. You get to make something. As a writer, you make a script and give it to someone else. The only doubt I had as a director—I

think only single people should be allowed to do it. It's like having an affair. You have to be possessed and obsessed by your lover, which is your movie. Even if you're home on time. Not that I've ever had one, but I imagine if you're having an affair, you're always thinking about the other."

There are two "heavy" effects sequences, but "most of the special effects, I'm hoping, is the acting," Ravich said. "The movie is very stylized, very graceful, and I'm hoping the effects appear just at the right time, just when you've been lulled into thinking this is sort of a normal movie, where it's all about psychosis, but then the effects explode onto the screen." Especially as a first-time director, doing the effects was a challenge, "because it's all on faith. You shoot a blue-screen, and then... Everything else, the cinematography and editing, I had a feel for, from working on a short and I've been on a bunch of other movies. But [effects] is something I've never had a piece of, and it's a huge process, and a

long time from conception to delivery, and a lot of stuff you don't see till late. So that was a big challenge. I used two houses: Blue Sky for one scene, and Sony Imageworks for another. They're both really talented people, and I'm very happy with what they've given me."

Part of the location shooting took place in Manhattan, and Ravich found New York to be "such a Gothic city. We shot in what used to be the old stock exchange downtown, an enormous room designed by the people who did Grand Central Station. We put a party scene in there. The Charlize character starts out as this really pleasant, friendly, loving school teacher in Florida, and then when her husband gets back, they move to New York City. And, you know, she's the alien; you come from the South, from Florida, and all you know are your friends and family, and you're thrust into this kind of world of New York in winter, where you're kind of living on a space station, like SILENT RUNNING with Bruce Dern] where they put all the forests in outer space? You run around New York in the winter and that's what it's like. You go from habitat to habitat. I'm a native, but I imagine if you're from somewhere else...Everyone seems to speak in code. My goal in the movie is that she's the alien, the foreigner, she's uncomfortable here. And she's the eyes of the audience; she's who we love, and don't want anything to happen to."

As key makeup artist on the film, Deborah Larsen worked primarily with Charlize Theron, and noted the actress was the lead, and in almost every scene. Larsen also con-

WIFE

FROM OUTER SPACE.

tributed ideas for other characters, which included Johnny Depp, although Depp had his own makeup person. Theron's makeup design, she said, was kept "pretty simple; it was more into character development for Charlize, and the visuals of her transformation." In Florida, she's this beautiful, sexy, healthy-looking woman, but as she steps into the New York life, she drastically changes in appearance." In New York she becomes more of a darker creature. Her husband [Depp] is possessed by an alien at this point. She starts to see visions, and she's also pregnant. So it was a matter of changing her face, making it look a little fuller with different makeups."

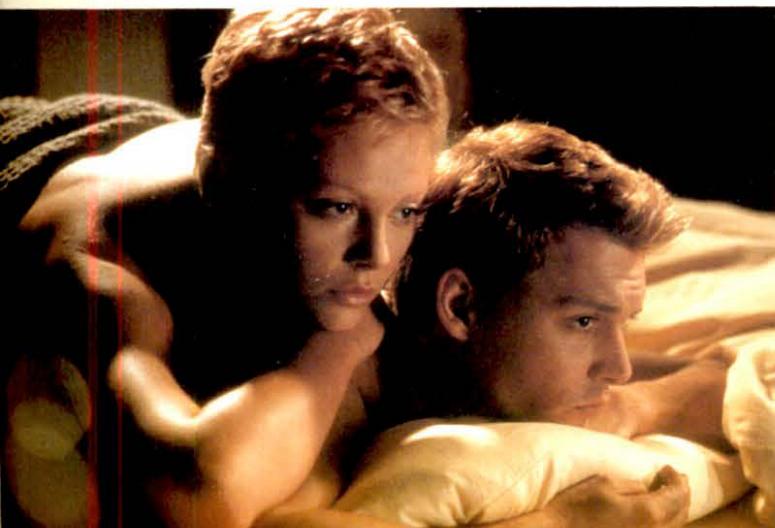
Larsen confirmed she kept the makeup work simple, without using prosthetics, although, she noted, "Kevin Yagher actually designed a prosthetic belly for her" to show her being pregnant. "Charlize is very beautiful and has a great body, and all of a sudden, she looks like she's six months pregnant. And they built twins that float in her body for the ultrasound." Larsen also credited production designer Jan Roelfs (GAT-

TACA) for adding some "amazing" work to the look of the film.

One of Larsen's responsibilities was to change Theron's appearance in some key places in the story. There is a scene in which Depp "figures out she knows something" and beats Theron up and throws her down a flight of stairs. "So she's in the hospital," Larsen said, "and Charlize and I just worked out this look for her, when you first see her, she's all bruised up."

They also decided to change Theron's eye color in this movie: "Her eyes are this beautiful shade of green, and we did her eyes in almost a royal blue, just because it was a little different. She also had very short blond hair. I had worked with her on MIGHTY JOE YOUNG, and then CELEBRITY, and then we did ASTRONAUT'S WIFE, so we wanted to change her visual look, to a little more all-American, and vibrant. So we used sapphire blue contact lenses that we had made. It gave her a more ethereal look, and I really wanted to keep her more angel-like against all this darkness she was going through. The twins she's car-

Ravich tells the alien saga from the wife's perspective "because that's someone, a human, I could know." New Line Cinema opens the film August 27.



Theron as Jillian Armacost, with shuttle astronaut husband Spencer (Johnny Depp), who has an accident in space and comes back subtly changed.

rying are starting to feed her information. She becomes very neurotic."

Larsen said other characters undergo "a very big transformation as well. Nick Cassavetes plays one of the astronauts who was in space with Johnny Depp, and they kind of implode, kind of self-combust, when the alien is not working through them properly. With Nick, we had this thing where he goes into a seizure, and starts to hemorrhage through his nose, his mouth and eyes. He has these contacts that were all bloodshot that we built for him. It's almost like a cerebral hemorrhage, where everything starts to come out. With Johnny Depp, they shot a different ending, and I'm not sure which one Rand [director Rand Ra-

vich] is going with, but he basically gets electrocuted." Larsen noted that Depp's alien persona is projected through his performance, not makeup or effects. "His acting is so amazing," said Larsen.

But Ravich noted that the alien-induced transformation of astronaut Armacost (Depp) "definitely involves some heavy-duty effects," Ravich said, "and also his tremendous talent. It starts off subtle, and then it grows just by acting talent, and there are some pretty trippy effects." Ravich declared he's been very gratified with the way the film has gone: "I've been blessed. I got very lucky, for a first-time director. They gave me a boat-load of money and two of the best actors around and an amazing crew. I can't complain." □

UNIVERSAL SOLDIER 2

Jean-Claude Van Damme vs. a computer bent on world rule.

By Jon Keeyes

In 1992, Carolco Entertainment united action heroes Jean-Claude Van Damme and Dolph Lundgren in *UNIVERSAL SOLDIER*. Surrounding the UniSol program which revived dead soldiers into near-indestructible killing machines, *UNIVERSAL SOLDIER* became a mega-hit profiting over \$100 million. Unfortunately for Carolco, the success of this science fiction super adventure couldn't save the company from bankruptcy.

Now, producer Craig Baumgarten has brought the film back to life in a sequel due in time for the last of the summer heat. Noted Baumgarten, "I wanted to do a sequel for a long time. Right after we did the first one Carolco got into financial trouble, and then they were in bankruptcy, and they owned the rights. So, for the longest time the rights weren't available. Nobody could do anything with it."

Baumgarten and his producing partner Allen Shapiro acquired the sequel rights last year and adapted a script by Bill Malone as the vehicle to continue the series. Noted Baumgarten, "Malone's script, called *MACHINE*, was about this super-intelligent computer that



Body building champion Kiana Tom plays Sierra, Van Damme's UniSol comrade.

transposed itself into human form and, with an army of robotic soldiers, threatens the security of the world. He had written it without any intention of it being a *UNIVERSAL SOLDIER* movie. We refocused the movie onto the man who had tried to stop the computer, that man being Luc Deveraux [played by Jean-Claude Van Damme]. Then Bill got involved in his own movie that he was going to direct, so John Fasano came in to help out and the script began to take shape."

With a greenlight from Co-

lumbia Pictures, Fasano (*ANOTHER 48 HOURS*, *ALIENS 3*) undertook the arduous task of turning an unrelated screenplay into a *UNIVERSAL SOLDIER* sequel. "When I began the process of reworking the story for what would become *UNIVERSAL SOLDIER 2* I didn't want to just carry on the same story as the first film," explained Fasano. "I began looking for ways to update it—make something unique out of it. I didn't want to do something like the *DIE HARD* series that is always the same hero in the same situation fighting the same type of terrorist. I wanted something that expands upon the story and puts the hero up against new challenges."

For Baumgarten, the biggest challenge was ensuring they created a story that would excite the fans, as well as lure Van Damme to the project. "Early on in the process I got Jean-Claude involved—we've been friends since the first movie—and he was ready to do a sequel. He liked the idea. He's never done a sequel to any of his movies. And obviously, there were concerns on everybody's part because the first one was a really good movie, really well received, action fans and science fiction fans both really

Creating the *Universal Soldiers* as seen in the 1992 Carolco original.

liked it, so we had something to live up to. I intentionally looked for a movie that hadn't been designed to be *UNIVERSAL SOLDIER*.

"So many times when you start out doing a sequel they tend to feel just like the first one; they're not new or surprising. We set out to reinvent the UniSol technology because it's seven years later and there would have been major advances in science and technology. We thought about it for a bit and no longer was it a rogue program running around in a truck but an established program with military value to the security of the country. We decided that the program was now 'online' and that it was being developed as a part of the regular military.

"We made a lot of changes, thought through what we believed the world would be like, and it seemed to us a really interesting idea that they would try and harness this super-computer to improve the soldiers, to monitor these soldiers, to help refocus the thinking and actions of these soldiers. Hence the character of S.E.T.H., the super-computer, that Michael Jai White [*SPAWN*] was brought in to play as a great antagonist for Jean-Claude.

"I think part of making a sequel—even though everyone in





Van Damme (f.g.) and 1992 co-star Dolph Lundgren are revived from cryogenic sleep as UniSol's in the original film written and directed by Roland Emmerich.

the first was great, is to try and make it surprising at some level, not to replay the same story-line and same characters. So we created the story that Veronica, the reporter, had died in a car crash and there had been a daughter from that marriage, and Luc becomes a single father trying to raise his daughter. And he is working on this program as a technical expert, sort of a training supervisor for these soldiers having been one himself."

Jean-Claude Van Damme was thrilled about the chance to recreate his character and showcase more than just his talent for action. Noted Van Damme, "In the prequel, if you will, Luc was a soldier—a guy who died during the war and was brought back to life as a Universal Soldier. And now, he's just a human being again. He's a guy who quit the project as a Universal Soldier and now he just works for the company.

"What's great about this character is that I can show more emotion in this film—I'm not the same guy from the first one who just follows orders. I now deal with the company and their super, high-pro army. The UniSol's don't have to be programmed with severeness to do their job. They're people who are trained to be

more efficient so I'm there to observe them, and my dimension as an actor can be explored more because I'm not just the guy who follows the orders. I care for them and those who have families on the side, and I'm working for the lab. So, I'm allowed more dimension in this one."

As the movie begins, a reporter named Erin arrives at the program's facility to do a report on the UniSol's introduction into the military industrial complex. Noted actress Heidi Schanz of her character, "Erin is kind of tough, but not tough in a hard way. She doesn't take a lot of flak. So when my character and Jean-Claude's character meet up they head butt—if you will. But I think it works nicely

Producer Craig Baumgarten, who made the original for Carolco, with Van Damme on the set of *UNIVERSAL SOLDIER—THE RETURN*. TriStar opens the film September 3.



JEAN-CLAUDE VAN DAMME

"What's great about this character is that I can show more emotion in this film—I'm not the same guy who just follows orders... My dimension as an actor can be explored more."

for the art of the character because they start at one end and take it completely somewhere else."

That somewhere else occurs when she and Van Damme are pulled into a web of action that explodes in their faces. S.E.T.H., the super-computer, decides it has its own agenda and begins using the Universal Soldiers to destroy anything and anyone that would stand in its way. S.E.T.H.'s primary target becomes Van Damme, the man who knows the program better than anyone.

Joining Van Damme and Schanz as the heroes is female bodybuilding champion Kiana Tom. Noted Van Damme of his co-star, "Kiana is great to work with. First of all, she's very physical so she came on the set very well prepared as an actress, and also she brought lots of energy and lots of personality. She's a very happy camper and she's my buddy in the film. There's no romance between us. She is more like one of the guys. She's in very top physical shape and it really shows in the movie."

With a movie that includes athletes like Jean-Claude Van Damme, Kiana Tom, Michael Jai White and WCW wrestler Bill Goldberg, the producers found a director who knew

how to complement the abilities of these action-heroes. Said Baumgarten, "I met a lot of people. I looked at a lot of directors who were interested in doing a sequel to a successful movie. I wanted somebody that I thought would bring a lot of energy and fresh perspective, who understood how to do great action which Mic Rodgers has done the last ten years of his career. He does great action and I felt this would be a great opportunity for him and that he would work really hard to make this a great movie. Jean-Claude agreed with me. Mic was just a natural choice."

Having worked as a stunt-coordinator on dozens of films including the LETHAL WEAPON series, and acting as the second unit director on BRAVEHEART, Rodgers and the team of producers set out to find the perfect location for the facility, as well as a place to choreograph great stunts. They choose the Super-Collider in Texas, a defunct research facility abandoned by the federal government.

Noted Baumgarten, "The Super-Collider, is just perfect for the exterior, as well as the interior where we're building all of the sets for the laboratories. Mic and his team of stunt

guys are the best professionals in the world. Their attitude and technical expertise is amazing."

For more than three months, the cast and crew endured the bitter cold winter of Texas to complete this \$40 million science fiction thriller. Noted Baumgarten, "To me it's an action/adventure film, but it certainly deals with science fiction. The whole notion of these super soldiers fascinates me because somewhere in the world there are governments or armies developing these." □

UNIVERSAL SOLDIER THE RETURN

BILL GOLDBERG

The WCW wrestling champ on squaring off against Van Damme.

By Jon Keeyes

Fans of WCW wrestling are preparing for heavyweight champion Bill Goldberg's last big showdown of the century. Goldberg won't be fighting "Hollywood" Hulk Hogan, nor will he be squaring off against Randy "Macho Man" Savage. Instead, Goldberg will be challenging Jean-Claude Van Damme when he plays the villainous Romeo in **UNIVERSAL SOLDIER—THE RETURN**. "Romeo is kind of an indestructible thorn in Jean-Claude's behind. I'm a terminator of sorts, only I'm a little bit bigger," laughed Goldberg of his character. As Romeo, he plays a Universal Soldier that is being controlled by a super-computer named S.E.T.H. When S.E.T.H. decides to take over the UniSol program Romeo is sent to kill Jean-Claude Van Damme, the only man with the knowledge to stop the soldiers. For Goldberg, getting the chance to leap from the wrestling ring to the big screen was an opportunity he didn't want to miss.

"This is the first film I've been on," said Goldberg. "Not to say that I took it because it was the first offer. I took the role because I liked the character. He is so much like myself, I didn't have to act that much. I really like the fact that I'm not having to act. For my first film, I took the role because it's very similar to what I do in the ring. I didn't have to stretch to do this role. I got to bring me into it. There is such a close comparison between my character and what I do for a living. I would definitely not want to take a role in a comedy, right now, because that would be the complete antithesis of who I am."

Goldberg's career first began in 1990 as a noseguard for the Georgia Bulldogs. He then moved on to professional football playing nose tackle for the Los Angeles Rams and Atlanta

Falcons. Unfortunately, a knee-injury in 1994 cut his pro football career short. However, an explosive personality and a desire to succeed pushed Goldberg onward until he found a home in the wrestling ring. As a wrestler, Goldberg has turned himself into an icon as the fastest rising superstar in the multi-million dollar World Championship Wrestling franchise. With his closely cropped hair, tattoos, and deadly speed, Goldberg burst onto the scene defeating Hugh Morris during his 1997 debut. He then proceeded to take the United States championship title away from Diamond Dallas Page in the spring of 1998, and followed this two months later by defeating Hulk Hogan for the World Heavyweight title. In two short years, Goldberg had become one of the premier wrestlers in the world—and an easy target for producers seeking an athletic foe.

While filming **UNIVERSAL SOLDIER—THE RETURN**, Goldberg found himself juggling his demanding wrestling schedule with a new acting career. Explained Goldberg, "Between appearances and shooting, my workout schedule has been virtually nothing," he said. "They do a lot of sitting around and waiting in the wrestling world and paralleling that is the movie world. I've actually only got to work out four times re-

Filming the showdown between Goldberg and Van Damme. "For my first film," said Goldberg, "I took a role that's very similar to what I do in the ring."



Goldberg as Romeo, the indestructible UniSol thorn in Jean-Claude Van Damme's side. "I'm a Terminator of sorts, only a little bit bigger."

ally good in the last month because my two worlds are colliding right now. Right now I'm just concentrating on doing reps when I get off the set in the evening. I try to catch a quick workout before I have to go to bed. The lack of working out has probably been the most difficult thing I've dealt with while filming. On the other hand, I like being down here in Waxahachie, Texas. For me to get any time away from the hustle and bustle of the big city is like vacation time. So sitting around here and waiting on the set for filming is by no stretch of the imagination painstaking."

Whether it's working out or relaxing, Goldberg exudes a genuine pleasure and joy for his chance to be in **UNIVERSAL SOLDIER—THE RETURN**. "My character in a nutshell brought me to this film," he said. "Hands down I can tell you that the main reason I'm here is because of my part. I could not have written or created a better character for myself. I feel really lucky that they found me for it. I'm playing an indestructible force. I get shot, run over, fall off a building, stabbed who knows how many times, and I keep going. You've gotta love Hollywood." □

UNIVERSAL SOLDIER JEAN-CLAUDE VAN DAMME

The kick-boxing martial arts superstar on turning producer for the sequel to pump up the action.

Jon Keeyes

It's a dreary night in Texas with temperatures below freezing. As a harsh wind howls across the desolate plains, a government laboratory rises from the darkness; flames licking at the sky from its rooftop. While the building burns, a man appears in an upper-story window with a body draped across his arms. With no hesitation, he steps onto the windowsill and leaps from the building. This brave hero is Deveraux, but the actor behind the character is none other than Jean-Claude Van Damme.

For the very first time, fans of Van Damme will be treated to his first sequel as he reprises his role as Luc Deveraux in Columbia Pictures UNIVERSAL SOLDIER—THE RETURN. "I love my role, and we've got a great cast and they're very enjoyable to work with," said Van Damme. "And this is my first sequel which is good for me because SOLDIER was one of my biggest films both domestically and foreign. And I know we have fans that have been looking for a sequel and it makes for a good start. And we've got this great cast and lots of action."

In the original UNIVERSAL SOLDIER, Van Damme played a soldier killed during the war, only to be resurrected years later in a science program that was creating superhuman soldiers. Things go amiss, and Van Damme becomes the target of a mass hunt when he tries to escape the program and regain his humanity. Said Van Damme, "I'm playing Luc Deveraux like the first one—a soldier who is



Van Damme as Universal Soldier Luc Deveraux (r) with Michael Jai White as S.E.T.H. the human embodiment of a super computer out to rule the world.

more than just a soldier. He's a universal soldier, and he became a problem. In UNIVERSAL SOLDIER 2, he gets attached to The Project to make a new proto-type for new soldiers—better ones. So I'm there to help, to make sure everything is going to be okay. It's not a very complicated character, largely because it's a simple movie. It's an action film. There's lots of fun and lots of action. It's hard to be very detailed about that character because he's simple. He's a father now with a daughter. There's no more wife. He's

a single guy and he's very attached to his job."

In UNIVERSAL SOLDIER—THE RETURN, Van Damme now works for The Project as a technical advisor. The UniSol program is about to become a regular part of the military when things go wrong. The super-computer that is controlling the soldiers decides it wants to take over the world, and begins destroying everything which could stop it. This includes Van Damme, the only person with an in-depth knowledge of how to stop the soldiers.

"What's great about this character is that I can show more emotion in this film," said Van Damme. "I'm not that same guy from the first one who just follows orders. I now deal with them and their super high-pro army. They don't have to be programmed with severeness to do their job. They're people who are trained to be more efficient so I'm there to observe them and my dimension as an actor can be more explored because I'm not just 'the guy who follows the orders.' I care for them and those who have families on the side, and I'm working for the lab—so I'm allowed more dimension in this one. And then, of course, there's the action."

And action is exactly what Van Damme is best known for. Beginning with NO RETREAT, NO SURRENDER in 1985, Van Damme has starred in more than 25 action films including BLOODSPORT, NOWHERE TO RUN and TIMECOP. In each and every film, he has been given the chance to exercise his martial arts abilities, and with UNIVERSAL SOLDIER 2 nothing is changing: "I can see myself continuing to do stunts for another ten years. I'm 38 and in good shape. When you think of an action star I'm lucky I'm still there. But I'm in good shape. I sometimes get bruises but it's not that bad. I stretch before the action and I'm not that heavy so I can still move fast. It's hard to find time on an action film to work out. I try to find time but many hours are spent working on the movie. You get an hour break for lunch and you have to train, change

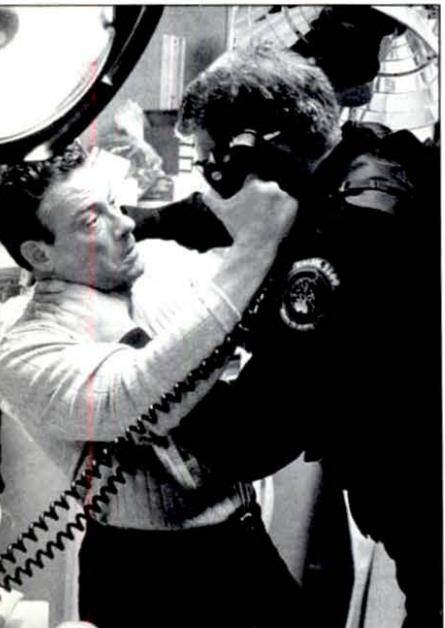
clothes, and get from this place to that place. It doesn't leave a lot of time.

"If I can share some tips as an actor for when you start a film like *SOLDIER*, the best way for me and many actors is to start a movie like this in very good shape. Before you start shooting you should come in perfect shape—for movies like an action film. You should come prepared physically because we're shooting for so many days—Monday through Friday and usually six days a week—and it's like 16 hours a day. It's lots of work with lots of physical stuff. I mean you're breaking through glass, and stunt cars, trucks, fights, and you're working a lot. So you need to be in good shape from the start in case you catch a cold."

"You should be in top shape when you start because you won't have time to work out. On the weekend, I try to find a little time to train and sometimes during the week I'll have a bicycle on the side. At lunchtime you don't have much more time than to eat, take a shower, and change your shirt because time is money on a movie. So that's about the best you can do."

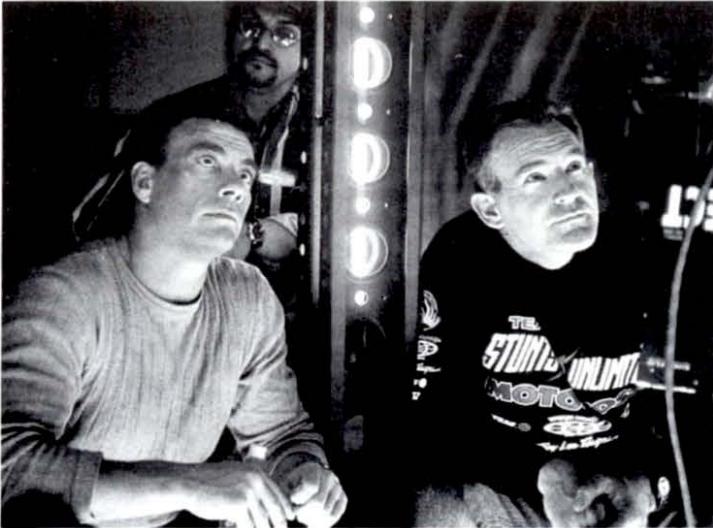
Van Damme continued by expanding upon his involvement in the actual stunt work: "It's very good to look at the area where you're going to do the stunt and to rehearse, travel

As head of the UniSol program, Van Damme fights off one of his own soldiers under computer control.



JEAN-CLAUDE VAN DAMME

"[Bill Goldberg]’s a big guy. When I see him wrestling I’m amazed. In the ring these guys are slapping each other down hard to make the snap and that takes some incredible control."



Van Damme reviews a take on the set with director Mic Rodgers. Van Damme revisits the material as a more mature actor and in better shape for the stunts.

it, like in slow motion the first time, then half motion and then full motion. And then make sure they know what they're doing with the camera because I don't like to repeat too much of the action. So it's like you have a good rehearsal. Everyone knows what they're doing and that's the way to do it."

A steady hand and steady mind are vital to Van Damme's action performances, but a demon haunted him which threatened both his welfare as well as his acting career: cocaine addiction. Recently, he made a public admission to having had a cocaine addiction and his recovery from this dependency. Noted Van Damme, "Keeping a secret like the addiction to myself is very hard first of all. If you have a problem it's always good to expose your problem that way you don't have any fear about it. I'm human. Life is beautiful, but life is a surprise every day. A few weeks ago I left my house and then I found out that my dog died and I tried to fly back to Los Angeles. What I'm getting at is that it's important to be in shape mentally, more than physically, because every day is a challenge,

on the good side or the bad side. So you have to be prepared each day to confront everything—the good and the bad—and the best way to confront things is by telling other people. If I tried to keep my addiction secret it would be a pressure, like steam building up in a pipe, and one day it's going to explode. It's good to tell somebody you have a problem because then they understand when you say, 'I'm happy today.'"

Happiness is exactly what one sees when they meet Van Damme on the set of *UNIVERSAL SOLDIER—THE RETURN*. Smiling, cheerful and playful, Van Damme bounces about the set playing jokes and helping his fellow actors. While filming *UNIVERSAL SOLDIER 2*, Van Damme got to do some extra-curricular acting when he went to the WCW wrestling match with the film crew. "It was a lot of fun being down at the wrestling show," said Van Damme. "Bill Goldberg, who is in our movie playing Romeo, is a really big action figure. And I was invited by him to the match. I was very surprised by the ambience of

the whole thing and all the children. But, I was ringside and Hulk Hogan came down the ring and was trying to challenge me. You know, challenge the movie star. And I had an exchange with him, though I don't think they were filming it for the TV. So I came up into the ring and we checked each other out and it was fun. I don't think I'm big enough for the wrestling, but I can kickbox and I can jump high. I'm amazed at the size they have to be, and remain that flexible and have that kind of control."

"I fight Bill Goldberg in the film, and he's a big guy, and when I see him wrestling and I watch these guys I'm amazed. I fight him in the film, but, you know, it's only part way or half way, but up in the ring these guys are slapping each other down hard to make the snap and that takes some incredible control."

On screen, Van Damme always appears to be in control, and now he's getting the chance to have further control behind the camera. Van Damme recently formed his own production company and with *UNIVERSAL SOLDIER—THE RETURN* he's not only getting to star in the film, he's producing it as well: "What's nice about producing a film like this is that I get to be very involved in the script, very involved in the fighting sequences and in the cutting so we can make the pace very fast, because it's not such a complicated movie. It's a fast ride with lots of action, with lots of fights, so I wanted to make it very fast moving."

"Of course *UNIVERSAL SOLDIER 2* has a lot of action," continued Van Damme, "but it's a sci-fi film that combines lots of different types of imagination. It's a special movie to me. I did the prequel, what, six years ago and I'm in better shape now than I was six years ago. When you watch the movie you can see it. It's been a great challenge for me. As an actor, I get to come back to a character with more maturity and more experience on the acting side of it. And physically it's more challenging and gets me into a new cycle of action and suspense." □

UNIVERSAL SOLDIER THE RETURN

MICHAEL JAI WHITE

*The martial artist behind *Spawn* on squaring off with Van Damme.*

By Jon Keeyes

Having appeared in films such as *SPAWN* and *THE MIKE TYSON STORY*, Michael Jai White is no amateur when it comes to playing villainous characters. White continues this legacy in *UNIVERSAL SOLDIER—THE RETURN* as S.E.T.H., a super-computer that controls the UniSol program and eventually turns antagonist to Jean-Claude Van Damme's hero.

"S.E.T.H. is somewhat like Hal from *2001: A SPACE ODYSSEY*," said White. "He oversees the soldiers and Jean-Claude's character oversees the whole UniSol program. There's a fail-safe element of the S.E.T.H. computer that when it's threatened by any enemy all of its information is downloaded into this physical body that they have in storage. When the computer realizes that the system may be shutdown for political reasons, it recognizes that as a threat and tries to preserve its existence as well as the other UniSol soldiers. It takes over this body that the project has on reserve, which is me. I'm the walking, talking S.E.T.H." White also doubles as the computer's voice.

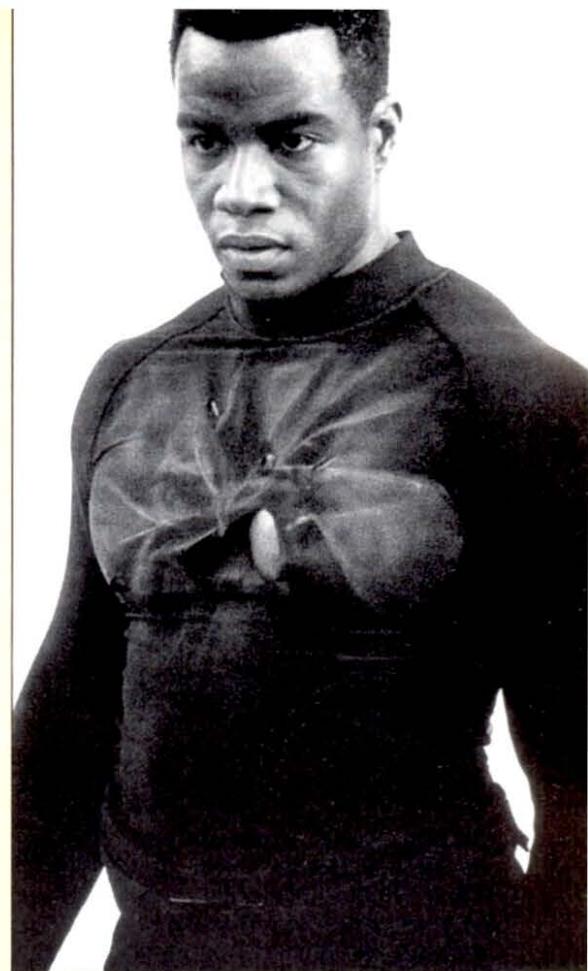
White was also in the first *UNIVERSAL SOLDIER*. "It's a little known secret," said White. "I was chopped down to basically one line in the beginning of the movie. I was not going to tell Jean-Claude that we worked together in the first one, but he remembered. And it was something that I felt good to thank him about because there was something he did that really showed me his character early on in that first movie. We were in a foxhole in Arizona and it was freezing cold and about two o'clock in the morning. I was wearing a short-sleeved shirt and he was wearing this

army jacket, and in between takes he would make me wear his jacket to stay warm without letting anyone else see what he was doing. I played soldier number two that gets killed in a second, but he didn't know I was going to be with him again in the future and he was just being a good guy."

Off-screen it's apparent by their interplay that a friendship has developed between the two actors, but on-screen White transforms into the menacing force which threatens Van Damme's very existence. "There are layerings of complexity between Jean-Claude's character and mine," said White. "He is someone I recognize as one of the fathers of the program, but when it comes to his existence versus mine I have to preserve myself. But, I'm slightly twisted in that situation. I wouldn't go at him as if he were the total enemy, but he has to be treated as such because I'm being threatened. I think the S.E.T.H. program, while in human form, starts to have these human qualities and maybe it seeps in from the body it takes over. He stoops to using Jean-Claude's daughter, who is also a friend to S.E.T.H. The human versus the computer becomes quite complex."

In *UNIVERSAL SOLDIER—THE RE-*

White rehearses with director Mic Rodgers and Van Damme for the film's action finale, "the most amazing fight scene in martial arts history."



White as S.E.T.H. the human embodiment of the supercomputer that controls the UniSol program, running amuck in an action take on Hal from *2001*.

TURN, White will get to showcase his own martial arts talents against Jean-Claude Van Damme in an ultimate finale sequence. "This is gonna be the most amazing fight scene that we've seen in martial arts history, or I'll die," laughed White. "I have seven black belts, and I've been doing martial arts for over 20 years, and I get to bring that experience to this ultimate soldier. None of us are going into the fight scenes knowing exactly what techniques we're going to do. I've been doing a lot of training for this that carries over from my workouts. I do katas, which is formalized movements, in several disciplines: I do Wu-shu, which is more flowing; Tai Kwon-Do, which emphasizes kicking; Goju, which is the first actual precursor to karate, the father of modern martial arts; Shodo Kan, which is probably my favorite style of all, aesthetic; and Kiokashin, which is probably the most powerful form of martial arts. I've had the honor to train with some of the masters of that style. When it comes to doing the actual fight scenes I'll pull out little elements of each of these different styles. And hopefully it will come off looking great on the screen."

THE ADVENTURES OF ELMO IN GROUCHLAND

**Movie fantasy from Jim Henson Pictures
and the Children's Television Workshop.**

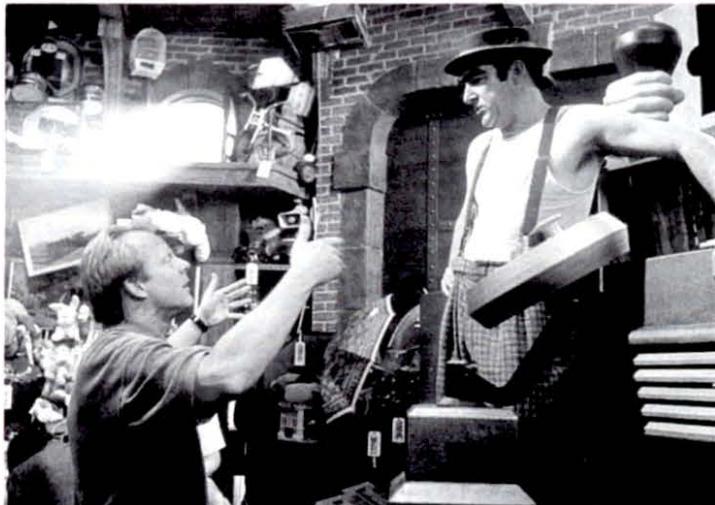
By Michael Beeler

Alice saw her screen debut in Wonderland, Dorothy went to The Land Of Oz and Peter Pan was originally presented in Never Never Land. But Elmo, that sweet, adorable, world-renowned star of Muppetdom, in stark contrast, will make his feature film debut in a stinky, junk-filled garbage heap called Grouchland. TriStar opens *ELMO IN GROUCHLAND* nationwide October 8.

"It's an amazing world," said director Gary Halvorson, about the rank ground that Elmo will encounter at the bottom of Oscar the Grouch's trash can. "It's full of wonderful contradictions. It's got a sense of organized chaos all over it. It's trashy, smelly and beautiful. All at the same time."

Jim Henson Pictures (JHP) and the Children's Television Workshop (CTW), in a musical production for Columbia Pictures, will proudly present *THE ADVENTURES OF ELMO IN GROUCHLAND*. It's been a long time coming. "David and I talked about making a movie about five years ago," said executive producer Brian Henson, about the initial discussions concerning this film he had with David Brett, President of CTW. "We decided that this movie would be a real opportunity for the two companies to come back together in a very intimate way."

JHP and CTW have not actively produced anything together since *THE MUPPET MOVIE* in 1979 and *THE MUPPETS TAKE MANHATTAN* in 1984. That's surprising to many since their companies have been linked for 30 years with the television production of *SESAME STREET*. But that as-



Gary Halvorson directs Mandy Patinkin as Huxley, Sesame Street's first villain, the world's greediest man who stands between Elmo and his beloved blanket.

sociation has been in name only. JHP has provided the characters, Muppeteers and support base for *SESAME STREET* but CTW has always been solely responsible for its management and production. The development stage of this shared production caused CTW, which has garnered over 70 Emmy Awards for *SESAME STREET*, a bit of concern. "Children's Television Workshop has not done a feature since 1984," said Marjorie Kalins, CTW producer for this film. "We had to come to terms with what it meant to do a *SESAME STREET* feature in the '90s when kids' entertainment and family entertainment has changed so much. We came to the conclusion that it had to incorporate a strong adventure story and at the same time have all the elements of *SESAME STREET* that kids know and love."

Finding the right storyline for Elmo was also very important to the people at JHP, since they have always felt that a good script and a good movie go hand in hand.

"We started with the notion of what would happen if you went down Oscar's trash can, which has always been a bit of a mystery," explained producer Alex Rockwell, who provided the genesis of *THE ADVENTURES OF ELMO IN GROUCHLAND*. "That led us to think about a far away land, like Grouchland. What if Elmo lost his ball down Oscar's trash can and ended up in Grouchland to get his ball back. We didn't have a whole lot more than that."

"So we took it to screenwriter Mitchell Kriegman [SATURDAY NIGHT LIVE, RUGRATS and REN AND STIMPY] for his ideas. Mitchell took my concept to a whole other level. He said,

'No, no, no, not a ball...make it a blanket. It's Elmo's blanket and he wants it back. That's what kids really love, their blanket, more than their ball.'

Kriegman, along with fellow screenwriter Joseph Mazzarino (*MUPPETS FROM SPACE*), mapped out the adventure, which includes Big Bird, Bert and Ernie and the entire *SESAME STREET* gang, with a great deal of reverence and glee.

"You've got a television show that has been on the air for 30 years," said Kriegman, who also serves as one of the executive producers for *BEAR IN THE BIG BLUE HOUSE*, a Jim Henson Television series nominated for two 1998 Emmys. "It has lots of characters, back story, and exploration, and you have to figure out how to bring that to a movie theater in a big way and make it somewhat epic and make the emotions important. The idea of Elmo and his relationship with his blanket was always attractive to me. And Oscar the Grouch has always been



"For a Muppet to pick up a glass of water I have to have three shots. What would be a simple human action becomes extremely complicated."

—Director Gary Halvorson—

sitcom, it's non-stop dialogue and jokes," said Halvorson, who has also worked extensively in the worlds of opera, jazz and rhythm and blues. "A movie is about images and ideas without dialogue. When I started working on the script, it was about how I could do the scene without any dialogue.

"When you work with Muppets it takes more time to set up the shot and get the shot. So every minute of every day had to be carefully laid out and the schedule rigidly adhered to. For example, a Muppet has only a certain amount of reactions. For a Muppet to go over and pick up a glass of water I have to have three shots. It takes an hour and a half just to rig the glass so that the Muppet can reach in, grab the glass and then make a camera cut so that the glass sticks to the hand. What would be a very simple human action becomes extremely complicated."

Complicating the movie further was a 30-day production schedule and a determination to remain true to founding father Jim Henson's commitment to quality family entertainment. "The biggest challenge with a film like THE ADVENTURES OF ELMO IN GROUCHLAND is that it's got to work for everyone," said Henson's son Brian, who began his career at age 17, performing marionettes under his father's direction in THE

GREAT MUPPET CAPER. "It has to be safe enough that parents feel they can bring their youngest child to his or her first movie and at the same time, entertain ten-year-olds, young adult parents, maybe even teenagers and college kids. That was a very big challenge. It was about getting the comedy to work but always remain innocent.

"A second challenge was that we had to make this film quickly. The 30-day schedule was half the time that we usually allot for a Muppet movie. But the key talent, on this project, rose to the challenge and proved us wrong. We thought that this would be a small movie but then when we looked at it, it wasn't a small one at all. It has all the production value of any Muppet movie that we've made. And that's a direct result of the talent of the production designers, lighting people, cameramen, director, the performers, the Workshop that made the characters and all of the wonderful, enthusiastic people who were part of this project." □

Elmo encounters Vanessa Williams as the Queen of Trash in the titular land inside Oscar's garbage can.

one of SESAME STREET's strongest characters. He pops up out of a hole and says irreverent things and he's a trickster. So I put all these elements together and said, 'Let's find a way for Elmo to go into the heart of Oscar's territory, where no one had ever been before.' And that's where Grouchland came from." Grouchland's crazy foundations, twisted shops and silly houses came to life through the creative imaginations of production/art designers Val Strazovick and Alan Cassie. To do this, they bought tons (ten truck-loads to be exact) of discarded rubbish, from flea markets and military bases around the country.

The very human Vanessa Williams (ERASER, DANCE WITH ME) joined the production to dance and sing as the Queen of Trash. Mandy Patinkin (CHICAGO HOPE, THE PRINCESS BRIDE), was brought aboard to serve as Huxley, SESAME STREET's first villain, who, as the greediest man in the world, stands between Elmo and his beloved blanket.

Jim Henson's Muppet Workshop also designed a variety of new characters that include an annoying bunch called The Pesties, ruled by Bug the Bug; Grouch Girl Grizzy; and The Stenchmen, a unique band of trash monsters who sing and dance.

"I've arrived," joked Williams, about her pivotal role. "Elmo is adorable but he does like to kid around a lot. It's truly wonderful to be working with him and to have such a fabulously rich musical number, that I believe will be a show stopper. But

more than that, to be doing something that my kids will be able to enjoy and cherish for the rest of their lives"

Gary Halvorson, who has directed numerous sitcoms such as FRIENDS, THE DREW CAREY SHOW, ROSANNE and the first episode of Jim Henson's MUPPETS TONIGHT, makes his feature film directorial debut with the adventure. His comments belie a seasoned director being reborn into the fantastical, and complicated world of Muppetronics. "When I direct a

A safe landing for a Muppet and his blanket. TriStar opens the first collaboration between Henson and the CWT since 1984's MUPPETS TAKE MANHATTAN on October 8.





.FILES

Series creator Chris Carter on tying up the loose ends for the show's final season.

By Debra Warlick

If you are seeking the truth about the future of THE X-FILES, series creator Chris Carter is prepared to give it up—maybe. The most prolific peddler of paranoia on television today, the often evasive Carter says the wildly successful series will end after the seventh season. Probably.

When grilled—rather, questioned—at the Television Critic's Association press tour in Pasadena, CA, Carter addressed the future of the show and its movie franchise.

Taking to the stage in his customary casual look of a white T-shirt, gray sweater, jeans and boots, Carter reassured the large group of television critics that the Fox drama will continue in one fashion or another. "Right now, everyone is prepped for the seventh year to be the end of THE X-FILES, so we're looking at that," said Carter. "With a show, anything can happen, but right now, that's what we're shooting for. But I, of course, hope that the television series will become a movies series, and I'm not looking to spend all of my capital, so I want to make sure that we continue to have good stories to tell, and that THE X-FILES continues to have avenues to explore."

But is the seventh really the last season? (Critics have a hard time letting go.) "I think

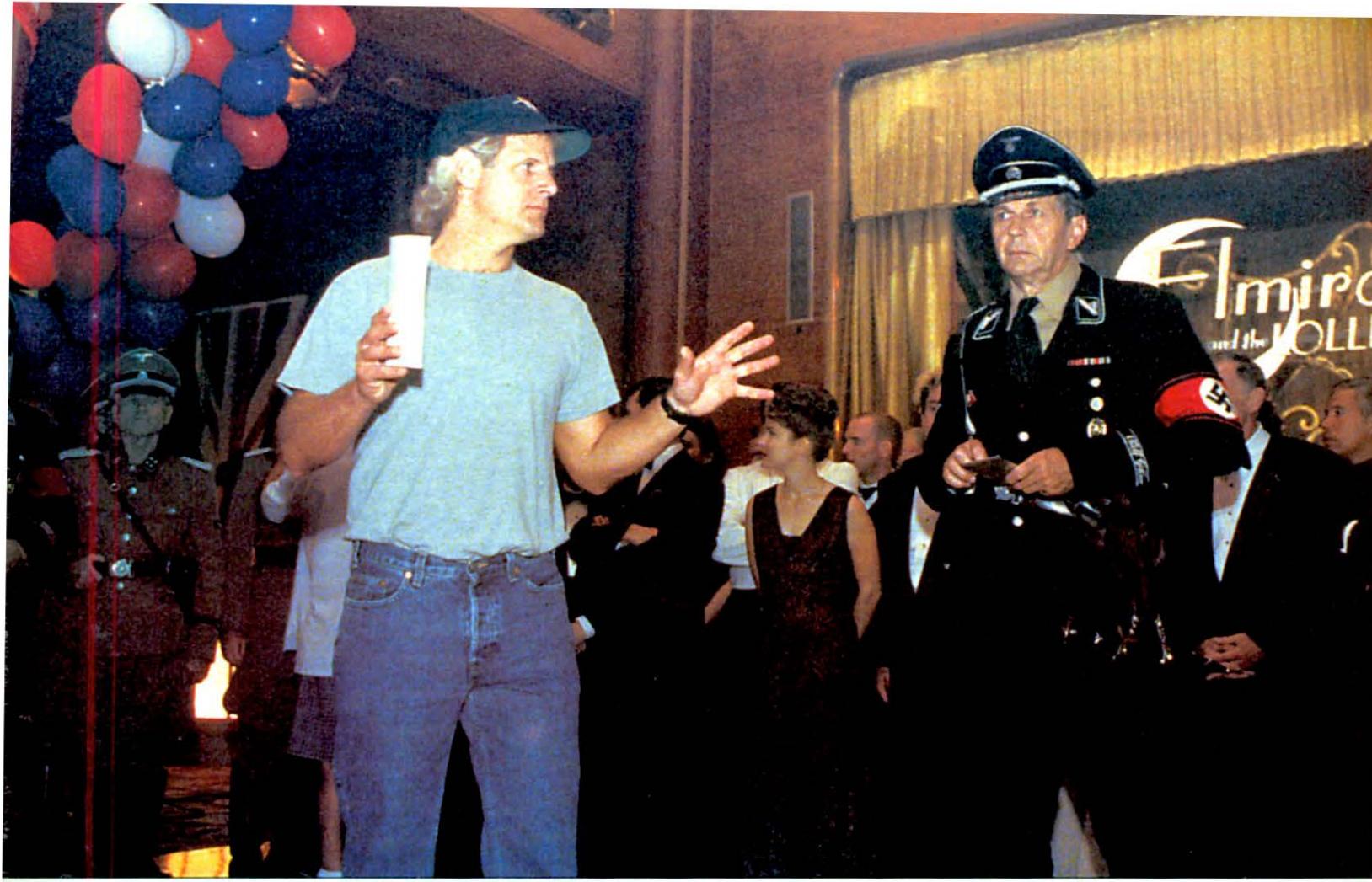


David Duchovny and Gillian Anderson as Mulder and Scully go undercover as married couple Rob & Laura Petrie in seventh season's comic "Arcadia."

we are all kind of planning for that," said Carter, "because it has to do with the actors as well, with what they want to do. So, I think we're all shooting for that. But you know, things have a way of changing and it has a lot to do with enthusiasm. It has a lot to do with contracts. There are many different factors. But as a storyteller, I want to know where I'm going, and what my parameters are, always, so that I can choose when to say what, and certainly with the mythology, it's important that I know where I'm heading. I don't want to have the rug pulled out from underneath me, surely."

And what about the possibility of an eighth season? (A really hard time.) "An eighth season could happen. I'm not anticipating it, but I don't want to say that it wouldn't happen, but right now, the plans are to culminate at the end of season seven.

"I think it really is being dictated by David and Gillian's enthusiasm, but, there comes a time when everything has to come to an end. And so, seven, eight, nine seasons of a show—that's huge, for a show to go nine seasons *a la* SEINFELD. That is rare. And I think this is a situation where it's very, very hard work for actors to do a dramatic show for seven seasons that's not ensemble. And I think it really is probably a good choice to try and take this and



Carter directs William B. Davis in sixth season's Nazi era tour-de-force "Triangle," blocking out extended takes a la Alfred Hitchcock's ROPE.

make it a movie series after a television series, because the work is arduous."

The work is so all-consuming for Carter, 42, that he feels he has sacrificed everything for his shows. "When you're doing 44 episodes of entertainment a year, a lot of things get left behind in your life," said Carter, who also produces 22 episodes of MILLENIUM. "And friends

and family and what used to be preoccupations or pursuits go by the wayside. And while I wouldn't trade it for anything, I look back and I haven't surfed as much as I would like to have surfed over the last seven years. I'm sorry for that. One day I'll get back out there in a big way.

"But it becomes those very, very tough times. My wife and I

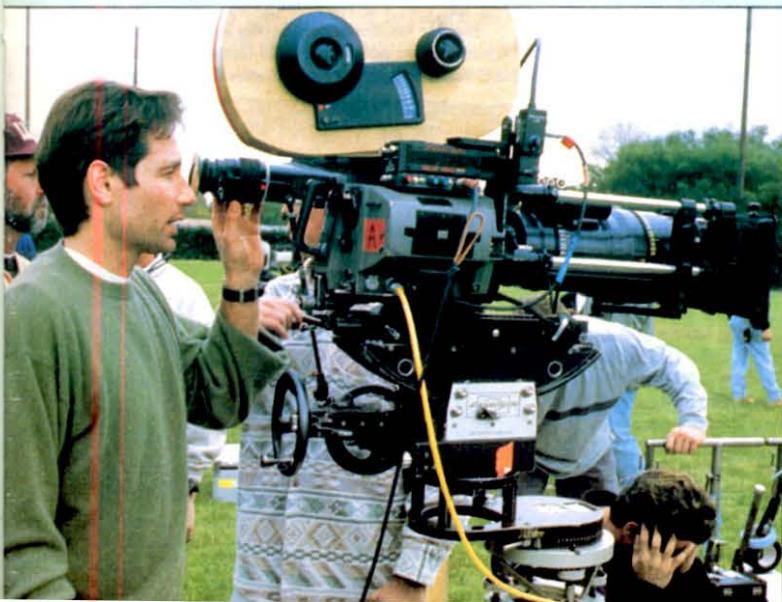
went to Santa Fe over this Christmas vacation. Last year was the first time in five years that I had to write at Christmas, or rewrite..." he said.

With the success of last summer's X-FILES movie, FIGHT THE FUTURE—raking in about \$85 million domestically and almost \$200 million worldwide—Carter plans on continuing the franchise as soon as time

allows. "[That success] means that we'll do another movie," he said. "That movie will answer the question if there will be a third movie."

Although Carter noted the timing would have been great to release the second movie at the end of the seventh season, it's just not going to happen. "That would have meant we would have had to have made it this

Duchovny got behind the camera sixth season to direct his own script of "The Unnatural," a saga of black baseball and aliens that put heart back in the series.



SIXTH SEASON EPISODE GUIDE

By Paula Vitaris

"You can kill a man but you can't kill what he stands for, not unless you first break his spirit. That's a beautiful thing to see."

—Cigarette Smoking Man

THE BEGINNING

★1/2

11/8/98. Written by Chris Carter. Directed by Kim Manners. Editor: Heather MacDougall.

THE X-FILES's sixth season opener ties together last season's finale, "The End," with THE X-FILES movie released in the summer of 1998. Mulder and Scully find themselves facing a panel of doubting FBI brass headed up by a skeptical Assistant Director Maslin (Wendie Malick). Mulder says he's ready to prove his story about his adventures in the Arctic with Scully, but then Scully announces she doesn't have the scientific proof he thought she had. The situation only worsens when he learns that Spender (Chris Owens) and Fowley (Mimi Rogers) have been assigned to the newly reopened X-Files office, and he and Scully will now work for Assistant Director Kersh (James Pickens, Jr., a fine addition to the cast).

"The Beginning" is another mile down the X-FILES Road of Mythology. Monster aliens? This is something out of a schlocky pulp novel with the science of the show dissolved into complete technobabble, where the words "virus" and "DNA" are slung about like hash in a greasy diner. And the word "trust" is the emotional equivalent, with Mulder and Scully arguing over Fowley's intentions, as well as Scully's failure to back up Mulder at the inquiry. Fowley has no life of her own whatsoever; she exists merely to create obstacles between Mulder and Scully, both of whom come off looking not too intelligent.

Skinner points Mulder in the direction of evidence, but otherwise straddles the fence again. The CSM blows smoke. Neither are compelling here. The most interesting character in all of this is little Gibson Praise, played with great veracity by Jeff Gulka. His honesty cuts through all the cant. The surgical torture that Gibson suffers as a Consortium guinea pig is indefensible. With all the computer imaging equipment available these days, there would be no need to open up Gibson's skull. The possible consequences—from brain damage to death—are too great, if we are to believe that the Consortium members feel Gibson is invaluable to them. The only reason Gibson must endure this is to jolt the audience, and that is no reason at all.

THE X-FILES has a new director of photography this season. His name is Bill Roe, and to judge by "The Beginning," he is a great asset. Although the bright sunshine of new Los Angeles

Jeff Gulka as Gibson Praise, the Consortium's brain surgery guinea pig for alien/human hybrid experiments in season opener "The Beginning."



Bryan Cranston as Patrick Crump in "Drive," the show's take on SPEED. Mulder must keep driving fast to prevent Crump's head from exploding.

based locations is disconcerting—the show's aura of mystery suffers without the Vancouver fog and mist—the lighting of the interiors is eye-catching, particularly the dull red light of the power plant core area.

"It's Mr. Mulder to you, you peanut-picking bastard."

—Mulder to Crump

DRIVE

★★

11/15/98. Written by Vince Gilligan. Directed by Rob Bowman. Editor: Lynne Willingham.

Thoroughly bored by a routine domestic terrorism investigation in Idaho, Mulder takes an interest in a newscast on a farmer's television: Nevada highway police have captured a belligerent speeder who may have taken a hostage. When the woman is rescued and put into a patrol car, she begins banging her head against the window. Suddenly blood splatters the glass; her head has exploded. Mulder ducks the domestic terrorism assignment, convincing a protesting Scully to accompany him. They go to Nevada and Mulder injects himself into the local police investigation. It turns out the speeder is one Patrick Crump (Bryan Cranston), a roofer, and the woman was his wife Vicky (Janine Venables), and they must drive fast to stay alive.

Like Keanu Reeves in SPEED, Mulder must keep driving fast (although without a minimum speed limit to worry about) in order to keep a bomb from exploding—in this case, the bomb being a head (only on the X-FILES...). "Drive" is a highly kinetic episode and director Bowman keeps the action pushing forward at a swift pace, with the characters' realization that time and land is running out on them. The only relief is in the few conversations Mulder has with Crump, who turns out to be, in some ways, not all that different from Mulder himself. Crump is just as paranoid and conspiracy-believing as Mulder.

It's the X-file itself that is the flaw in "Drive." Scully's explanation how Extremely Low Frequency waves might cause insupportable pressure in one's head sounds like pure hokum, and there's no explanation why speed and driving west would lessen the pressure. Scully once again has a Stupid Medical Moment, when she examines Vicky Crump's corpse without using a face mask or protective glasses.

Where "Drive" truly succeeds is in the teamwork displayed by Mulder and Scully. Although communicating mostly by phone, or at times unable to communicate at all, they instinctively trust each other's judgment, in particular when Scully tells the police captain (Michael O'Neill) that Mulder must have a reason for evading the police roadblocks, even though she herself doesn't know why he's done so. Mulder also makes a reasonable intuitive leap in figuring out that high speed and heading west are necessary to keeping Crump alive as long as possible.

"Drive" never achieves a real apotheosis because the climactic moment when Crump dies

takes place off-screen. It passes over the climax and focuses on the anti-climax. Duchovny is excellent at the end, when Mulder exits the car silently, passes Scully, removes his tie and stares out at the sea, sad that he has not been able to save the disagreeable Crump.

James Pickens, Jr., as Kersh, has little screen time, but he is a strong presence, and creates a much different boss than Skinner. He has a low-key irony that, in addition to his position of authority over Mulder and Scully, makes him a bit menacing. But you also have to like him for the sarcastic tinge of his scoldings, even when he's unloading them on Mulder and Scully.

"I suggest you get your Nazi paws off me before I give you one in the kisser!" 1939-Scully

TRIANGLE

★1/2

11/22/98. Written and directed by Chris Carter. Editor: Louise A. Innes.

"Triangle" is certainly an ambitious episode. Carter, who wrote and directed, decided to borrow the technique Hitchcock used in ROPE, shooting each scene until the camera literally ran out of film. This requires an enormous amount of blocking, since one mistake and an entire 10-minute take is wasted. He also shot "Triangle" in a widescreen aspect ratio of 1:85:1.

The narrative structure pays a bit of homage to THE WIZARD OF OZ, since much of the action takes place "over the rainbow"—or inside the Devil's Triangle in the Caribbean—in 1939. The episode also cuts back to the present day, until the fourth act, where the past meets the present. The fourth act thus has shorter scenes, and is full of screen wipes and split-screen work to show each milieu simultaneously. Everyone certainly deserves an A for effort.

The Lone Gunmen, we learn, have downloaded a satellite image that reveals a surprising object floating in the Sargasso Sea off Bermuda: the luxury liner the Queen Anne, disappeared in 1939 and never found, despite sinking, supposedly, in 60 feet of water. Mulder, of course, is unable to resist investigating a ship that popped out of nowhere and flies to Bermuda where he finds himself on the missing Queen Anne. But it's the Queen Anne of September 3, 1939.

Somewhere in all this is a nice little story about trust—putting Mulder and Scully's trust to the test is a recurring theme this season—but it's lost inside the vertiginous camerawork, the endless, monotonous tracking shots up and down hallways, and a fourth act crowd scene (in this case, the British sailors-German soldiers brawl) usually found in a Carter-directed episode. And it's hard to see just what is happening; the lighting is so dark that it often obscures the action completely.

The story is also sacrificed to moments meant to titillate the viewers, particularly Scully kissing Skinner, Mulder kissing 1939-Scully, and Mulder telling Scully he loves her. When are these kisses

Mulder encounters a Scully look-alike in "Triangle," on board the 1939 Queen Anne lost in the Devil's Triangle, which Carter filmed in scope.





Carter works with Duchovny on the set. Carter is leaving open the possibility of another season of the show after the seventh season, beginning in October, and looks forward to launching a second feature film.

summer," he said, "and I can tell you it is not going to happen this summer. But I can see it possibly happening in 2001 or 2002. I don't think you necessarily have to have a movie right in the theaters after that [the season finale]. Maybe a year is a good amount of time before the next movie. Right now, we're playing it by ear, because we've got as much as we can possibly handle."

In doing the second movie without the worry of incorporating it into the television series, Carter's going to have an easier time of it. "I have big ideas for the second movie," he said. "One of the tricks in doing the movie was to be creatively conservative. We still had two more years left to do on the series and we didn't want to do a movie that would reduce interest in the series. I had to perform tricks that most moviemakers don't ever have to think about. And so I'm looking forward to the time when I can make a movie that doesn't necessarily have those requirements or those restrictions."

Of course, making the next movie will require the participation of its stars. Carter feels confident that Gillian Anderson and David Duchovny will make a return appearance. "Gillian asked me the other day about doing the next movie, so I know she's excited to do it," said Carter. "I'm assuming David is excited, too. We've spoken about it. It's a matter of finding the time and setting the time aside. I think both David and Gillian, rightly so, have movie careers ahead of them, and they're very anxious to start doing something besides playing Mulder and Scully. Who

"I had to perform tricks most moviemakers don't ever have to think about. I'm looking forward to a time when I can make a movie that doesn't have those restrictions."

—Chris Carter, Director—

could blame them? So I think it's giving them some time to exercise those creative urges and then come back and put on those FBI clothes again."

But can you tell us for sure? (Again, that letting go problem.) "I know everybody wants definites, but I can tell you that they're very enthusiastic. I can tell you there are no contracts to do it, but I know everyone's intentions are to do another movie."

Because the show moved from Vancouver to LA last year, cast and crew are still settling in. Carter had seemingly resisted the move from his favorite shooting locale (where MILLENNIUM is still based), but is now pleased with the decision. "We've got a fantastic crew," he said. "I can tell you that actually moving to LA, in a way, rejuvenated the show by giving us new stories to tell, new places to tell them, new staff, new crew. I think the show looks as good as it's ever looked."

Does Carter envision the show continuing with new stars? "It could happen," he said. "I don't know... If I start having anxiety about the future, or changing, finding new Mulders and Scullys, I think it would actually get in the way of doing that good work. So, right now, I don't think about problems that don't exist. But if it came down to it and someone said to me, 'Let's do an eighth year,' and 'would you consider a new Mulder and Scully,' I wouldn't not consider it, but because I don't have to consider it right now, I don't. Is that evasive enough?"

The idea of continuing the show in a series of television movies is not an option. "I don't want to do that," said Carter. "I want

that are not kisses going to end? First it's a faux-Mulder almost kissing Scully in "Small Potatoes," then a real Mulder almost kissing a real Scully in the X-FILES movie, and in "Triangle" Mulder kissing a Scully look-alike whose only meaning for him is her resemblance to his partner.

None of the characters Mulder meets in his dream or time trip is remotely intriguing; they draw our attention only because they're played by X-FILES regulars familiar in other roles. If this episode is a dream, then Mulder's visions of Spender and CSM as Nazi officers, Skinner as a German secretly friendly to the Allies, Scully as a tough-minded government operative on a secret mission, are pedestrian, offering no new insights into these people.

The fourth act is particularly problematic. The choice of Benny Goodman's rousing "Sing, Sing, Sing" on the soundtrack, turns everything—the running around the ship, the big fight—campy, not to be taken seriously. "Isn't this fun?" we're being told. The ballroom battle, for all the flying of fists, is dull and clunky; there's no rhythm, no punch. It's just there, something to distract everyone so Mulder and 1939-Scully can sneak away, giving Mulder the chance to convince her that she must get the sailors to turn the ship around.

Although "Triangle" shares with last year's Carter-written and directed "Post-Modern Prometheus" the idea of the unreliable narrator, the former improves on the latter. We may not know if the 1939 part of this episode is a dream or an actual venture into a Devil's Triangle time warp, but the story is clearly told by Mulder, affording "Triangle" a stronger narrative structure and a true point of view.

Again, the story boils down to the trust Mulder has in Scully, whatever year she exists in, and Scully rushing off to rescue Mulder from his latest mishap. We've seen this kind of protective action by Scully before ("Colony" and "End Game" come to mind), and her loyalty is admirable. The twist this time is that Mulder's trust and affection for Scully has changed into incipient and for now one-sided romance. If Carter really means to bring Mulder and Scully together romantically, then it's time to stop pussyfooting around with such an adolescent approach to their relationship. If romance is not in the cards, then end the tease and focus on what's really in their hearts and minds.

"Mulder, you are acting bizarre!"

—Scully to Morris

"Jealous?"

—Morris to Scully

DREAMLAND

11/29/98. Written by Vince Gilligan, John Shiban, Frank Spotnitz. Directed by Kim Manners. Editor: Heather MacDougall.

THE X-FILES returns to Mulder's Shangri-La,

Mulder finds himself in the body of MIB Morris Fletcher (Michael McKean) in "Dreamland," settling for sitcom level comedy instead of thrills.



Area 51, a.k.a. Dreamland, in a two-parter that might have been a thrilling speculation about what's really going on at the top-secret military base, but instead settles for sitcom-level comedy and a "reset button" finale. Even so, there are some gratifying moments along the way.

"Dreamland" may be THE X-FILES' homage to STAR TREK, considering that a phrase like "space-time continuum" is used to explain the episode's X-file. Body-switching is a familiar science fiction trope. Here, it's mostly a device for weak comedy, with Mulder, in the body of MIB Morris Fletcher (Michael McKean)—an anti-Mulder—bumbling along while he gets oriented to the unfamiliar territory. Mulder—and Duchovny—never get to express the anxiety anyone would feel in such a situation. The scenes at the MIB office are believable enough and the writers let us see that MIB office politics aren't that much different from office politics anywhere. But once Mulder goes to Morris' house, the comedy turns sour. Morris' family are all caricatures—the kids are stereotypical self-centered adolescents and wife Joanne (Nora Dunn) is a shrew. Duchovny also now has an unfortunate tendency to mug, particularly during a sequence lifted straight out of the Marx Brothers' DUCK SOUP, when Mulder makes broad faces and gestures before a mirror. Duchovny and McKean do a satisfactory if not spectacular job of aping each other's actions, but the bit stops the story dead. Mulder's wacky posturing is out of character; it's the kind of thing Eddie Van Blundt from "Small Potatoes" might do if he had once again assumed Mulder's shape, but not Mulder himself.

Duchovny has a fine moment when Mulder is the only "MIB" to show concern for the agonized gas station attendant who has been fused to the floor. This entire scene, which includes the murder of the attendant and the torching of his business, is played seriously, and suddenly, for a moment, this episode really clicks. The Washington, D.C. scenes, work much better. Gillian Anderson's exasperated reactions to the piggish Morris are a hoot, and Michael McKean, as Morris, is perfect. The terrific thing about McKean is that, even if the episode was played straight, he'd still be right for Morris, because he conveys the idea that Morris, for all that he is a buffoon, is also a dangerous guy. And he humanizes Morris, allowing us to see a man frustrated with his job and his life, but also unable to realize that he's his own worst enemy.

"We could have lots of fun together once you got to know me, you know that, Danes?"

—Morris to Scully

"I still got my gun."

—Scully

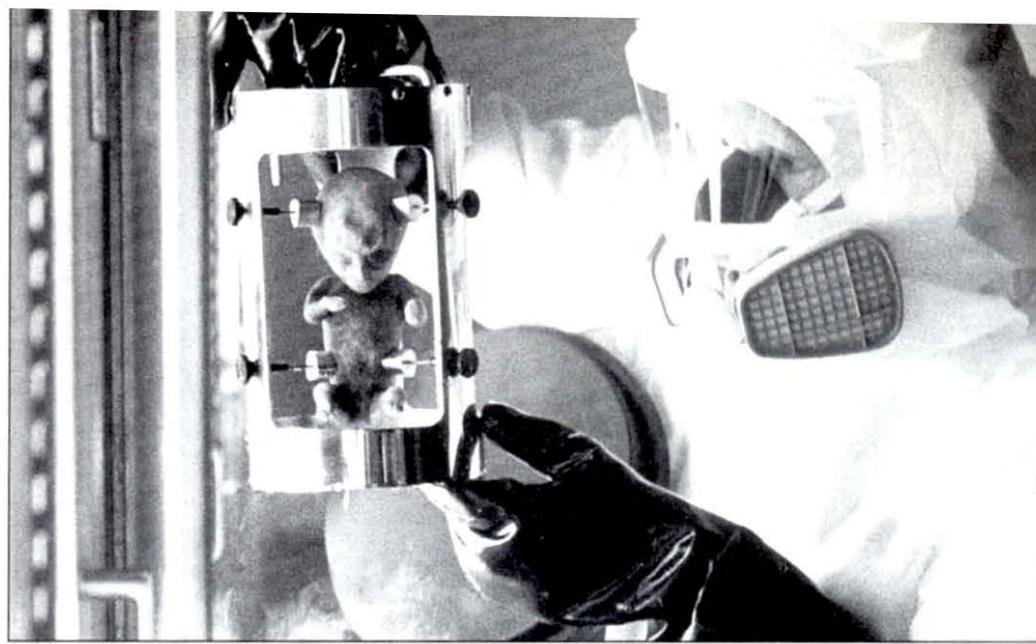
DREAMLAND II

★★

12/6/98. Written by Vince Gilligan, John Shiban, Frank Spotnitz. Directed by Rob Bowman. Editor: Lynne Willingham.

The continuation to "Dreamland" begins with

Scully taunts Fletcher in Mulder's body with handcuffs in "Dreamland II," but instead of an apartment sex romp he just gets the third degree.



Extracting DNA from an alien fetus to create the first human/alien hybrid in sixth season's "One Son," the conspiracy's effort to make mankind more resistant to an alien takeover, a final season plot thread.

to do theatrical movies. That's what I'm interested in doing, although I appreciate what ALIEN NATION did."

Though the February two-parter "Two Fathers/One Son" answered a lot of the show's mythology questions, it also raised new ones. Carter likes to keep it ambiguous while shifting the show's direction. "That doesn't necessarily mean that everything's wrapped up and finished," he said. "In fact, there's a lot to do. But we're making some choices, knowing that the show is moving toward a kind of completion, and so we are planning ahead for that. So, this is part of that move to get the ultimate answer, if you will, possibly, about what happened to Mulder's sister. You know, watching THE X-FILES now for some 130-odd episodes, that every time we give you an answer, we also ask a question. Every answer has its own set of questions that come along with it. I think you can look for more of that."

Carter undoubtedly likes the challenge of making changes. He said, "Because so much is going to be explained, you might wonder where we're going to go. You may say, 'Where can they possibly go with this?' We've thought about all those things. I think that will be the thing that keeps people coming back—'Where can they go now?' And I look forward to dealing with a whole new set of problems. And I think when you see the conspiracy exploded, you're going to see that there are lots of characters who were out there working as free agents that might be—create strange bedfellows, and I think that's going to be fun."

"When you see the conspiracy exploded, you're going to see there are lots of characters who were out there working as free agents who might create strange bedfellows."

—Chris Carter, Director

Another way the creative team behind THE X-FILES has found fun is through the so-called goofy episodes (think of Michael McKean, Nora Dunn and Victoria Jackson in their guest starring roles). Noted Carter, "The movie was the biggest mythology episode, so we knew we had to service the movie in the season finale coming into the sixth season. But then we wanted to

take a lighter tone. We wanted to tell stories. A lot of people have come to love the lighter stories, and I think that beginning with the work that Darin Morgan did, it showed that the show is very elastic. And because of that, it excites the writers and the actors to take the show in different directions, and because it can pop back to shape for a mythology episode, we decided this year to explore some different kinds of storytelling and I think it's been very satisfying for everyone. Certainly the ratings reflect it."

Since Carter is known as the conspiracy theorist's best buddy, one of the critics asked about Carter's own level of paranoia. Has it increased or decreased over the years? "Increased, for the same reason yours has, because of the Internet, because of the invasion of privacy, because of the ridiculous laws that are passed in this country. And the politics of the country are sort of alarming to me, particularly right now, in considering what's on television right now. I guess my paranoia comes from those changes."

Would Carter ever link the X-FILES mythology to current events such as the presidential sex scandal?

"I could never do anything that twisted," he said. □

X-FILES

CHRIS OWENS

From bartender to "Son of a Cigarette-Smoking Man," Agent Spender rocks Mulder's world.

By Debra Warlick

Chris Owens believes.

Well, at least in serendipity. After supporting himself for 15 years as a bartender, the Toronto native landed a couple of gigs on THE X-FILES. The show's creator, Chris Carter, pegged him as the Young Cigarette Smoking Man and then as the dancing Mutato.

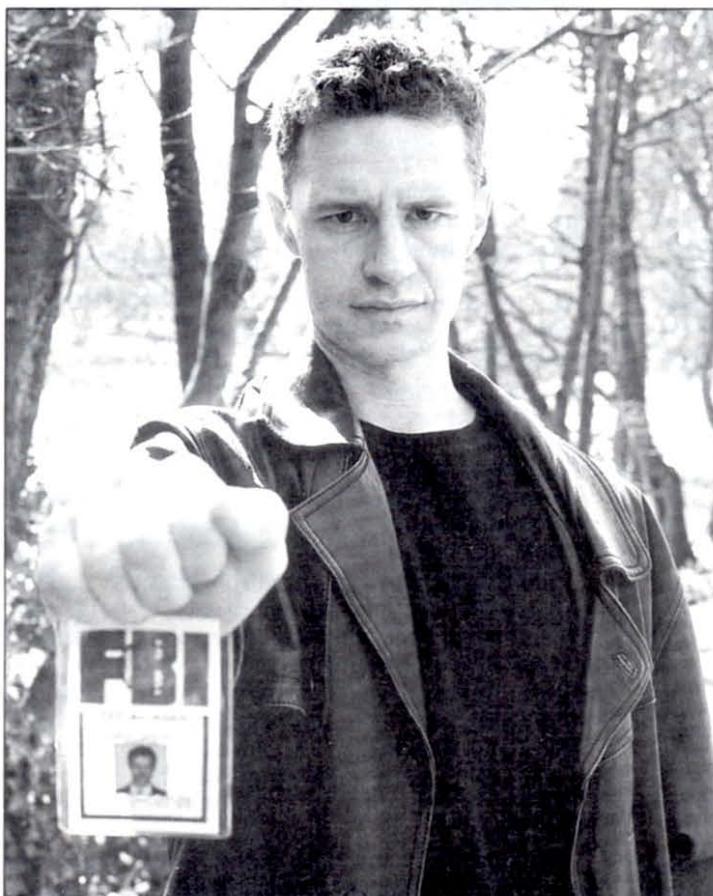
Nice work, but nothing steady. Until one night, after seeing a movie with a friend, Owens found himself on the other side of a bar, drinking a martini. "I didn't know they served guys with two heads," said a voice belonging to Carter, who just happened to be hanging out at that same Vancouver bar. He then said, "Have you heard the good news?"

"That's how I found out I officially had the job as an FBI agent on THE X-FILES," said Owens in a telephone interview from Los Angeles. "I had heard rumors that Chris was interested in hiring me to play a new agent on the show and I was thrilled to hear it from him."

So the much-maligned and often-vilified Agent Spender (aka Weasel Boy) was born. Owens, 37, moved from Vancouver with THE X-FILES when the decision was made last year to start shooting in Los Angeles. He now has a long-distance relationship with his girlfriend—a law student—of several years.

Read his X-FILES resume and it is apparent that Owens has played rather unattractive and even downright creepy roles. Just look at this history:

His X-FILES experience began in 1996 in an episode as the Young Cigarette Smoking Man (definitely not a good guy role geared to win the hearts of fans) and re-ap-



Former bartender Owens as Spender, a thorn in Mulder and Scully's side, won the role after being cast by Carter as the young Cigarette Smoking Man.

pearing in that role the next year in "Demons." In the part of the Great Mutato, he turned heads as the musically-challenged (big fan of Cher's) mutant. Carter must have liked what he saw. Soon after, Agent Jeffrey Spender began showing up regularly as a likely nemesis to Agents Mulder and Scully.

To further cement his penchant for portraying bad boys, Owens donned a Nazi uniform in the critically-acclaimed "Triangle" episode late last year.

His past acting work includes relatively small parts in the films DISTURBING BEHAVIOR and COCKTAIL, as well as

television roles in ALMOST GOLDEN: THE JESSICA SAVITCH STORY, Carter's other creation, MILLENNIUM and, STARGATE SG-1. He also appeared in the 1997 television movie THEIR SECOND CHANCE, along with fellow X-FILES bad guy Nicholas Lea (Alex Krycek, AKA Rat Boy). Much of Owen's steady work came from the theater, including playing the role of the Gentleman Caller in "The Glass Menagerie."

For many, to know Spender is to loathe him. The young agent comes on board, only to block the heroes at most every turn. Spender has no respect for Mulder and appears to take an active part in the conspiracy. And to top it off—he's a son of a Cigarette Smoking Man.

But he's not all that bad, noted Owens. "I like the ambiguity of someone who has gray areas because they are the most interesting characters to play. It's also closer to real life for me. I know that fans view Spender as a darker character, but I really feel that he's doing his job in trying to survive in a

very strange world," he said. "Sometimes you have to make compromises or sacrifices. I think the reason most people label him a bad guy is because he opposes Mulder, and Mulder and Scully are the heroes of the show. But you have to realize Spender's background is completely different from Mulder's. He's a believer in the paranormal and I am not, so I don't respect his work. Sensitive guy that he is, he takes it personally."

Although Owens' character is almost universally despised, there are some die-hard Spender Defender's out there—and one fan has a web page with that very name.

Morris speculating on Mulder's miserable life, then cuts back to Mulder, near Area 51, being hustled into a truck by soldiers, screaming to Scully that he's really Mulder. He's thrown into a holding cell. The episode's action shifts between Dreamland's Area 51 and F.B.I. headquarters in Washington as Scully tries to make sense of things.

There is minor fun to be had in "Dreamland II;" Scully's adroit trapping of Michael McKean's irredeemably slimy Morris, Gillian Anderson's annoyance with McKean's comic rudeness is amusing. Julia Vera once again delights as the pilot caught in the body of Mrs. Lana Chee. But much of what happens here is purely illogical. How many times can Scully fly out to Nevada in just a few days, and how can she even afford it, when there's no chance she will be reimbursed? The reversal of the time-space continuum warp also makes no sense. Everyone's memory is wiped out, and things "un-happen"—dead people even come back to life—but yet time is undone only in this small bit of Nevada. Scully herself seems inconsistent; she dashes back and forth over the entire continent several times, but told just once that there's no chance of reversing the warp, she gives up further efforts. Her farewell scene with Mulder rings hollow.

While Mulder's oddness, his pain and isolation, his obsessive quest for proof of extraterrestrial life and the paranormal, have been mined successfully for comedy in previous episodes, in the "Dreamland" two-parter they are used as a starting point for dreary, sitcom-level comedy and cloak-and-dagger farce. The tone of the episode is set by Morris' opening monologue, a snide analysis of Mulder's life. Morris, taken seriously, could have been a truly unforgettable character, and General Wegman, by far the most interesting of the others at Area 51, is underused. "Deep Throat," the series' second episode, is a far superior story about similar subject matter. There was no need to make "Dreamland" a two-parter; there is a lot of unnecessary rushing back and forth between Washington and Nevada, in order to stretch out a thin, gimmicky premise. "Dreamland II" winds up with the odious "reset button" firmly pressed. This isn't one of the ambiguous endings for which THE X-FILES became famous; this is refusing to let your characters deal with the consequences.

"Bah, humbug."

—Mulder

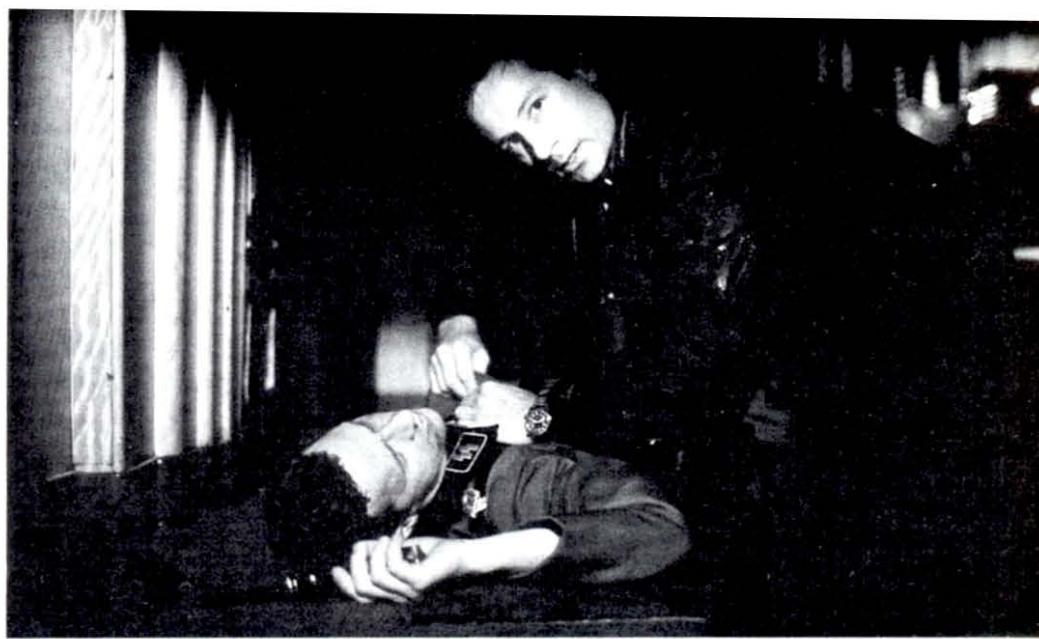
HOW THE GHOSTS STOLE CHRISTMAS

★ 1/2

12/13/98. Written and directed by Chris Carter. Editor: Lynne Willingham.

It's a dark and spooky Christmas Eve. Mulder is staking out an ominous house. Scully drives up and tries to convince Mulder to go home, but he wants her to help him investigate the house. He tells her that it used to be the home of Lydia and Maurice, who committed suicide in 1917, a time of

Mulder and Scully investigate a haunted house, sumptuously designed sets by Corey Kaplan, in the clichéd "How the Ghosts Stole Christmas."



Mulder overcomes Owens as a Nazi soldier in seventh season's "Triangle," an ambitious episode written and directed by Chris Carter, which was set on the World War II Queen Mary, lost in the Devil's Triangle.

The site eloquently and fervently defends Spender, as well as asks fans not to confuse the character with the actor.

Owens especially likes the site's Chris Owens Estrogen Brigade (COEB). You can imagine the homage it pays to the man—and that beats mixing drinks, said Owens, who was delighted to discover the existence of the COEB.

Owens was not quite as thrilled when he first got the script for the February two-parter that exposed much of the mythology of THE X-FILES. The good news was that Spender would be heavily featured, with a focus on the return of his mother, Cassandra Spender (the ex-Mrs. CSM and alien abductee) and conflict with his deadly dad. The bad news involved a bullet with his name on it.

"When I first found out, I thought 'Oh my God, he's killed me.' But it's ambiguous. There's definitely a gun and definitely a shot, but we don't see the body. This leaves the door open for an interpretation," he said. "It could well be a permanent death or a warning shot, a wound. I don't know at this point what's going to happen. It might be an X-FILES death."

So is he dead or not? At the end of two-parter "Two Fathers/One Son," it looked like it. But Owens was under contract to THE X-FILES for several more episodes sixth season. What are the chances he'll be back as an unqualified good guy?

However remote that might seem, it's a sure thing that Owens finds any uncertainty on the show as a definite improvement upon peddling prophylactics. "I worked at Condominium [a condom store

"I know that fans view Spender as a darker character, but he's doing his job trying to survive in a very strange world. You make compromises."

—Actor Chris Owens

in Toronto] for four months. I had so many years of waiting and I'd spent all my money...I needed a job and the guy was just opening the store," he said. "In the interview, he asked me if I was comfortable talking about sex. I said 'Yes, sir.' Advice was part of the job, he wanted people to feel comfortable and relaxed with no pressure."

Owens had no problem making customers feel welcome. He even congratulated a group of women who ventured in one day. "I noticed several women shopping and I stepped out and said, 'Ladies, I'd like to say it's wonderful to see you taking the initiative.' Fortunately, they laughed. Women were less embarrassed than men who came in," he said.

The short-lived experience was fun, especially when it came to observing customers. "Men would always come in and ask for extra-large condoms. I wanted to say, 'They do stretch, you know,'" said Owens, who remembers the glow-in-the-dark condom as a best seller.

Even considering the store discount, his new job offers much more in the way of benefits. "One of the lovely perks of being on the show is that I was invited to the All-Star NHL game in Tampa," said Owens, an avid hockey player who tries to hit the rink twice a week.

When asked about rumors that he is slated to star in Carter's new virtual-reality based drama, HARSH REALM, in the fall, Owens said he has not heard any official word. For that, he should just pop into a neighborhood bar for a drink. After all, it worked before. □

war and pestilence, rather than be separated. Since then, three couples have committed suicide in the house. A series of meetings between a separated Mulder and Scully and the ghosts of Maurice (Ed Asner) and Lyda (Lily Tomlin) ensue. The ghosts psychoanalyze Mulder and Scully, trying to convince them life is not worth living nor can they trust their partner. Whenever Mulder and Scully end the conversation and try to leave the room, they encounter a brick wall.

There are no dream-cum-time warps and no ten-minute takes, but "The Ghosts Who Stole Christmas" is a bottle show variant of "Triangle." It's got the same mock-serious tone and the same basic theme: Mulder and Scully investigate, then escape, from a dangerous location, and in the course of doing so, they undergo a test of their faith in each other.

"Ghosts" takes place in that most beloved locale of horror movies—the haunted house. In fact, this haunted house is so prototypical you can practically see the air quotes around it whenever it's lit up by the lighting—or at least seem to hear them in Mark Snow's organ in the teaser and the tinkling harpsichord later in the episode. Such signaling destroys any suspense. We know what's coming. They might as well put up a neon sign announcing, "Ghosts Be Here. C'mon In!"

The storyline varies from the unoriginal (even the dreadful THE AVENGERS movie used the exit from a room into the same room gimmick) to the genuinely creepy (Mulder's and Scully's corpses under the floorboards). Unfortunately, Maurice and Lyda turn out to be two rather unperceptive ghosts. They're interesting only because they're played by two great actors, Ed Asner and Lily Tomlin. Their goal is to get Mulder and Scully to kill each other, and to do that, they must instill doubt in our heroes. Alas, Maurice and Lyda have decided the best way to do this is to psychoanalyze them and point out all their weaknesses and fears, so we get endless psychobabble dialogue about Mulder and Scully's darker sides, revealing only that Maurice and Lyda misunderstand the relationship.



A flame-enveloped demon forcibly extracts an unholy birth, kicking-off "Terms of Endearment," a middling monster of the week episode.

nothing particularly scary; 3) Mulder and Scully become part of the X-file rather than the investigators of the X-file; 4) the events might not have happened. It's sad to see THE X-FILES degenerating into a stream of self-parodying episodes that contribute no new insights on the characters or the show itself.

I love you, Laura. No matter what. You know that, poopydoo?"

—Wayne Weinsider

TERMS OF ENDEARMENT

1/3/99. Written by David Amann. Directed by Rob Bowman. Editor: Louise A. Innes.

"Terms of Endearment," written by newcomer David Amann, is this season's demon episode. Laura (Lisa Jane Persky) and Wayne Weinsider (Bruce Campbell, ARMY OF DARKNESS, BRISCOE COUNTY, JR.) of Hollins, Virginia, are told by their obstetrician that their unborn baby has some strange bony growths on its shoulder and head. Laura takes the news calmly, but Wayne is upset. Laura's brother, Deputy Arky Stevens (Michael Milhoan), goes to FBI HQ and is assured by Agent Spender the case will be given priority, but after Stevens leaves, Spender feeds the report into his shredder. Several days later, Mulder arrives in Hollins, the taped-together strips of Stevens' report in hand. It turns out that Wayne has a second pregnant wife, named Betsy (Grace Phillips), who scolds him for his frequent absences, but it turns out that Betsy wears the pants in this second family.

"Terms of Endearment" is a middling monster-of-the-week episode. Wayne's quest for the perfect family is mildly affecting, and touches on the frequent X-Files theme of familial anxiety, but the emotions raised are not particularly strong, as Wayne is rather a dull demon. Genre fave Bruce Campbell, always a strong presence, does his best to inject milquetoast Wayne with some spine and to make us feel compassion for his murderous character. The real guest star stand-out is the lovely Grace Phillips as Betsy, Weinsider's second pregnant wife. With her icy blue eyes and toothy smile, she expertly walks the line between small-town mother-to-be and secret demoness. She seems altogether "normal," but she imbues Betsy with a disconcerting intensity that keeps you wondering just what she is up to. Lisa Jane Persky gives a solid and sympathetic performance as the unfortunate Laura.

This is the episode that will go down in history for Mulder's statement to Scully that he is not a psychologist. No, he's only the greatest criminal profiler in FBI history, but dang it, he's not a psychologist and how is he supposed to know what Wayne Weinsider is thinking? Perhaps, technically, Mulder isn't a psychologist, since the only degree he has, according to what little information we have about his background, is a Bachelor's from Oxford. But for Mulder to declare so bluntly that

he is "not a psychologist" is absolutely ridiculous, undercutting completely his background, his reputation, and the occasional psychological insight the writers allow on the show. Supposedly this line is an ad-lib from David Duchovny. What was he thinking? What were the producers thinking to leave it in?

"Don't ya'll need a warrant or subpoena or something like that?"

—Cindy

"We usually just say please."

—Scully

THE RAIN KING

★★

1/8/99. Written by Jeff Bell. Directed by Kim Manners. Editor: Heather MacDougall.

It's Valentine's Day in drought-ridden Kroner, Kansas, and Sheila Fontaine (Victoria Jackson) is writing a valentine to her boyfriend, ne'er-do-well Daryl Mootz (Clayton Rohner). A drunken Daryl charges in, upset about a wedding announcement Sheila placed in the local paper. They argue, Daryl departs, Sheila cries. As Daryl drives away, drinking a beer, hail begins to fall furiously. He runs off the road, slamming into a tree. The hail, strangely enough, is in the shape of hearts.

The online fans dubbed THE X-FILES' sixth season "X-FILES Lite" with good reason. "The Rain King" is yet another whimsical episode meant to be a wry look at romance rather than criminal activity or even the paranormal. An X-FILES episode where no one dies (except a cow) is certainly a welcome change, but unfortunately, its exploration of love—romantic or platonic—is superficial at best. "The Rain King" has a few genuinely sweet moments, mainly when David Manis as TV weatherman Holman Hardt is on screen. Manis's Holman may be wistful and lovelorn, but he is also an intelligent and a dedicated professional. Mulder and Scully also have a few amusing exchanges concerning their love lives, or lack thereof, and moments like those are truly engaging.

"The Rain King" ultimately fails, however, because the woman at its center, TV station employee Sheila Fontaine, is a selfish, childish, bubble-headed dope. Comedienne Victoria Jackson is disastrously cast; she is unable to scratch below Sheila's candy-shell surface. Sheila is pure cartoon.

This season the show is focusing more and more on the nature of Mulder and Scully's relationship, not only to the detriment of the cases but to the detriment of the relationship itself. It's one thing to leave an X-file ambiguous and unsolved, but to play footsie with Mulder and Scully's feelings towards each other is not only false characterization, but threatens to make the relationship the central focus of the show, rather than the cases themselves, which should be used to define and reflect the relationship.

The dead cow gag is poorly executed (the cow looks like a toy animal that's been jerked away by a string) and offensive, turning the suffering and

Victoria Jackson as Sheila Fontaine kisses Mulder in "The Rain King," another whimsical example of sixth season as X-FILES Lite.



Ed Asner and Lily Tomlin star as Maurice and Lyda, ghosts who psychoanalyze Mulder and Scully in "How the Ghosts Stole Christmas."

The ending veers from out and out disgusting—Mulder and Scully dragging themselves towards the exit, leaving a wide swath of blood on the floor, while Bing Crosby sings "Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas"—to the grindingly sentimental. And the two ghosts who tried to get our heroes to kill each other or commit suicide are now presented as sweet homebodies who just wanted to enjoy Christmas. And Mulder and Scully exchange presents, to the accompaniment of violins and piano (this must be the official "heart-warming scene").

The pleasures of "The Ghosts Who Stole Christmas" are the gorgeous, beautifully detailed sets designed by Corey Kaplan and the atmospheric lighting by Bill Roe. Visually, this is a feast, especially considering that most of it takes place in one room. But this is the fourth episode in a row in which 1) the tone is mostly comic; 2) there's

X-FILES

WILLIAM B. DAVIS

TV's best bad guy, Cigarette-Smoking Man, still smolders as he reveals new dimensions.

By David Hughes

The more we learn about him, the more we love to hate him. As television's best/worst bad guy, Cigarette-Smoking Man still smolders.

"Hi, how are you?"

It's not exactly the kind of words you expect to hear out of the same pinched, nicotine-stained lips of THE X-FILES' Cigarette-Smoking Man, an individual as dangerous as he is mysterious, and who could make the above greeting sound like a death threat. But this is not, strictly speaking, Cancer Man himself, but his altogether more affable alter ego, Canadian actor William B. ("for Bruce") Davis. It may be barely a year since *CFQ* last spoke to Davis, but a lot has happened in the intervening months. Back then, like the rest of us, the actor was waiting to see how THE X-FILES would translate to the cinema screen; how the show would return to television after its freshman feature outing; and how the move to Los Angeles from Vancouver would affect the series. Now that the jury has delivered its verdict on each of those questions, what are Davis' own views?

"The first time I saw [the movie] was at the official premiere," he said, "and it was hard to really gauge it there, because it was a special kind of audience. And, of course, I'm just a quivering mess, hoping that my work looks all right!" He laughed. "So, I wasn't really assessing the movie. So then I went back three or four weeks later and watched a matinee in Vancouver in almost an empty theater, and I really liked it. I liked maybe the first two-thirds better than the end part," he added, "just because my taste is more for the mystery than for the action-adventure part, but I do understand that action-adventure is a big part of the movies these days. It's just not a big part of the movies I go to."

Davis feels that the film successfully captured the spirit of the series, while also creating a big-screen experience. "Even on some of the smaller scenes, such as where



Davis makes an appearance at the Screen Actors Guild awards in L.A., putting on a friendly face for the fans.

the Well-Manicured Man meets the Syndicate, just because it was 'widescreen,' you could see so much more of the room, and the depth of people in it. I think that added something quite special."

After his supporting role in the film, Davis returned to THE X-FILES in "The Beginning," not only the first episode of the sixth season and the first to follow the film, but also the first to be filmed in Los Angeles following the show's relocation from Vancouver, its home of five years. "It was certainly challenging, especially at first," he said of the move. "It is, in some ways, more difficult to do the show here, because everything is more expensive, and everything is further apart, so just getting from location to location [makes] things take

longer, so we don't have any spare time. It's been quite a crunch on the directors, just trying to get it done.

"They're a good crew," he continued, "but we did have a well-oiled machine in Vancouver—the crew knew just what to do, and when, and how THE X-FILES was different from other shows. It looks like television," he explained, "and of course it is, but it's different from CHICAGO HOPE and ER and other shows which tend to have a pretty central set that's often pre-lit, and we do much more location work from episode to episode. That's been a bit of a shock to some of the crew. But the standard of the show has been very good," he added. "There's been no loss of quality; it's just that the show is costing a lot more money."

Arguably the biggest challenge of the new series came with Davis' next sixth season appearance: "Triangle," the dreamlike episode in which Mulder is knocked unconscious, only to find himself on a World War II cruise ship populated by thirties-style lookalikes of Scully and Skinner, and an SS officer who's the spitting image of Smoking Man.

"To shoot it was truly a challenge," Davis said. "There were huge problems for the cast and crew because of the size of it, and [because] it was one of the first shows we'd done with this crew. We were also doing it in long takes, with no cutting back and forth, so it was kind of like doing live television. If one person out of 14 in the scene made a mistake, the take is dead, and you have to do the whole thing again, rather than take it out and cut in another shot or something."

"And then the Queen Mary, where it was filmed, had restrictions on how long we could shoot," he continued, "so we couldn't do the endless overtime that we normally do. Or, at least, we couldn't do it in certain locations on the ship. It's the actual Queen Mary, and it's been mothballed into a museum, basically, berthed in Long Beach, California, you know. People pay money and



Davis as X-FILES CSM, the Cigarette Smoking Man, Chris Carter's potent symbol for the banality of evil.

tour around. It's also a hotel, because a lot of the staterooms have been made into guest rooms." Did any of the cast or crew stay there during the shoot? "I didn't, but I think some of the crew did, at first, until they decided it was a little cramped. The ship itself is still in its original condition—it hasn't been restored or renovated or anything—and it was looking its age."

As if all this wasn't challenging enough, all of Davis's dialogue was in German. "I certainly didn't realize I was going to be speaking a lot of German until I got the script, which just said 'CSM (in German)'," he laughed, "and then I went, 'Oh yeah? Okayyyy...'" So how did Davis—who had no more spoken German before than fellow X-FILES actor Nicholas Lea, alias former Smoking Man lackey Alex Krycek, had spoken Russian before Chris Carter asked him to—cope with the tricky Teutonic

“Cigarette Smoking Man is moving from a traditional figure into a real person. There’s richness coming in, so for me it’s more interesting.”

—Actor William B. Davis

speakers on the show, which I thought was a little unfair."

Davis was absent from the next few episodes, but came back with a vengeance in the epic "Two Fathers"/"One Son" two-parter aired during February sweeps. "They were major [episodes] for me," he said unnecessarily, "and really quite exciting. It dealt with me on two levels, really, because it dealt a lot with the mythological part of the conspiracy—where it's moving to and what's happening next with that—and at the same time,

death of a helpless animal into grist for the episode's humor mill. The final scene is insipid, with its patently false pastel sky and bird, Judy Garland singing "Over the Rainbow," mommy Sheila smiling and holding her baby while daddy Holman beams on the TV screen. It's THE X-FILES gone mad on a sugar high.

"Choosing by not choosing, defending a center that cannot hold."

—Skinner

S.R. 819

1/17/99. Written by John Shiban. Directed by Daniel Sackheim. Editor: Heather MacDougall.

"S.R. 819" is the annual Skinner-centered episode. It opens with Skinner deathly ill in a hospital emergency room, his body distorted by pulsating, distended veins. As he lies on the table, Skinner muses in a voiceover on the choices he has refused to make in life. When his heart stops, the physician in charge, Dr. Cabrera (Jenny Gago), refuses to resuscitate him. She knows there's no hope. The episode then flashbacks 24 hours. Skinner receives a mysterious call; a synthesized voice tells him he has only 24 hours and he's already dead.

Mulder learns that Skinner was doing a security check on Senate Resolution 819, and physicist Kenneth Orgel (John Towey) had come to the F.B.I. to warn Skinner that the bill would be a gross misuse of technology. Mulder believes that Skinner has been infected with nanobots, miniature machines that can be injected into the bloodstream, and that S.R. 819 will export that technology.

"S.R. 819" is the best of the Skinner-centered episodes, but its resolution is unsatisfying. The plot is virtually a retread of the CSM/Skinner subplot from "Memento Mori," except this time it's Krycek who's forced Skinner between a rock and a hard place. The flashback structure with the protagonist in great physical danger has become formulaic now on THE X-FILES, but on a surface level, the story retains a certain amount of suspense. We know, despite the teaser, that Skinner will not die, but the mystery of how he got into that condition is fairly engrossing, thanks in great part to skillful editing and the swift pace of the episode.

But why oh why, if the writers decide to bring back Krycek, do they clap a long wig and a beard on actor Nicholas Lea, keep him mostly in the shadows, and give him only a few minutes of screen time? Lea is one of the show's greatest assets; he is a dynamic actor and his mere presence automatically jacks up the tension. He has been sadly under-used this season.

The episode's real failure, though, lies in Skinner's emotional journey. The episode begins with Skinner's voiceover as he lays dying. He is contemplating his life and how he has always chosen the middle course, straddled the fence. Later he tells Scully that he hasn't been a strong ally to her and Mulder, that he's been living a lie, that he's made mistakes and stupid choices, and

Mitch Pileggi as Skinner in the hospital emergency room in "S.R. 819," deathly ill, his body distorted by pulsating, distended veins.



during the times he's refused to choose, his choices have been made for him. It's a powerful confession from Skinner, yet three weeks later, afforded another opportunity to level with Mulder and Scully, he shuts up tighter than a vacuum-packed jar. He has looked death in the eye and bared his soul to Scully, but now he refuses to do the courageous thing. He will not confide in the two people he knows he can trust, the two people who not only could help him, but want to help him. Skinner may have survived physically, but inside he is dead.

"Most people are idiots."

—Fellig

TITHONUS

★★ 1/2

1/24/99. Written by Vince Gilligan. Directed by Michael Watkins. Editor: Louise A. Innes.

New York City. Alfred Fellig (Geoffrey Lewis) silently watches a young woman deliver mail in an office building. She stands out to him because he sees her only in black and white. He follows her onto the elevator. To her relief, he leaves a few floors below, but then the elevator cables snap and the car plunges to the bottom of the shaft. When the doors open, Fellig is there, snapping photos of the dead and injured. Scully and Mulder are called in to investigate Fellig, who is a press service stringer and on-call photographer for the New York Police Department, for murder. The man not only seems to show up first at murder scenes, but two of his negatives from one murder show he was there before he was officially called to the site.

In Greek mythology, Tithonus was the brother of Priam, King of Troy. The goddess Aurora fell in love with him and prevailed upon Jupiter to grant Tithonus immortality, but she forgot to ask Jupiter to grant him eternal youth, so Tithonus continued to age without dying. Finally, he grew so feeble and decrepit that life became intolerable, and he begged Aurora to kill him. Since he could not die, she turned him into a grasshopper. Alfred Fellig does not age—he seems permanently stalled in his early 60s—but perhaps the analogy could be made that he is spiritually worn-out and thus as ready for death as the Tithonus of legend. In any case, it is Fellig's longing for death that allows Scully the opportunity to contemplate, once more, her own mortality.

Unfortunately, Fellig not only sees the soon-to-be in black and white, but is a monochromatic character himself. He has no compassion for the people whose deaths he witnesses and there is nothing in Geoffrey Lewis' performance to indicate that Fellig may be hiding any genuine feelings either from himself or from others for the people he photographs. He is merely very, very tired of life.

Scully's conversations with Fellig take an interesting turn only once, when he says that he's lived long enough, and she asks, "What about love?" That's an unexpected and beautiful question, but the philosophical implications are dropped.

Geoffrey Lewis as Alfred Fellig, a crime scene photographer who can foresee death and longs to die himself in the noir-drenched "Tithonus."



Nicholas Lea as Krycek and Chris Owens as Spender watch an alien dissolve into green goo in "Two Fathers," the beginning of a two-parter.

when Fellig suddenly sees her in black and white and knows she's about to die.

This is not Gillian Anderson's finest hour. She looks tired and her performance appears tranquilized, although she does an excellent job of showing Scully's amazement and near-paralysis when she is shot, slowly sliding down to the floor and smearing blood all over the wall. The liveliest performance in the episode comes from Richard Ruccolo, as Agent Ritter.

The episode has a terrific "feel," however, thanks to its unrelieved somber tone and the noirish, dark grayish-green lighting, although at times it's difficult to distinguish the black and white victims from their surroundings.

"Looking for work, Agent Spender? Because if you are, I've got a whole pile in that middle drawer I'd love to shove down someone's throat."

—Mulder

TWO FATHERS

★★

2/7/99. Written by Chris Carter & Frank Spotnitz. Directed by Kim Manners. Editor: Lynne Willingham.

The alien invasion storyline heats up in another two-parter, which begins with the Cigarette Smoking Man telling an unseen listener about recent events. The Syndicate's doctors have finally succeeded in creating the first human-alien hybrid: Cassandra Spender, who has been missing since she was abducted by aliens in "The Red and the Black." But a group of faceless rebel aliens suddenly appear and torches all the doctors, leaving Cassandra unharmed.

To judge by the title, this episode was meant to be an examination of the Cigarette Smoking Man and Bill Mulder in their roles as fathers—not only literally as the fathers of Spender and Mulder, but also metaphorically as public officials entrusted with their country's fate. As dads, both men made a botch of it, and they're lucky their sons turned out as well as they did. As government employees, they're even more craven, if that's possible, but since Bill had been opposed to cooperating with the aliens, presumably that makes him the "good," although still flawed, father. The Mulder father and son analysis doesn't go anywhere, however, Mulder has nothing to say about Bill. THE X-FILES did a magnificent job in revealing Mulder's difficult relationship with Bill back in "Colony," "End Game" and "Anasazi," but since then Mulder's feelings about his father and his mother have rarely been touched upon. It's a subject ripe for exploration, even after all this time, and "Two Fathers" could have been the episode to do it, but instead the Cigarette Smoking Man and Spender get all the attention, with ominous lines from the CSM about how one can't imagine the death of children (a bit of ironic foreshadowing, but heavy-handed in retrospect). It's Spender, not Mulder or Scully, who makes the emotional journey in this two-parter. He goes from skeptic and admirer of his evil father to believer and betrayer, thus becoming his "own great man." Although Spender's transformation is credible, it's a little hard to care, because, well, he's such a dweeb. Chris Owens is a wonderful actor, but

he's defeated by the script. Even though the CSM/Spender focus gives the episode a spark of life, it takes away from the two characters who should be at the center of the story, namely, Mulder and Scully.

The episode might also have been called "One Mother," because there is a prominent mother figure, that of Cassandra Spender. Again, this is a character difficult to care about, because she is not written with any consistency. Not only is she a complete goofball, but her opinions shift whenever the plot requires. Last season she firmly believed the aliens were good. This season she suddenly realizes they're bad. Veronica Cartwright fights to give Cassandra humanity and the scene with the CSM confessing he can't kill her is a moving one between the two. (William B. Davis is also very good in this scene.)

The show's mythology has become so labyrinthine that Theseus himself couldn't find his way out of this narrative maze even with a global positioning device. Cassandra supposedly is the first alien-human hybrid. So then what are the Kurts from "Memento Mori?" Cassandra is "the one." Whatever happened to Gibson Praise, who was supposed to be "the one?" Or what about Mulder himself, who was supposed to be the key to the mystery?

At some point necessary ambiguity becomes muddled, illogical and bad writing, and THE X-FILES has crossed the line. This is a show that has become mired in its mythology, for the simple reason that it's been on the air too long, a prisoner of its own success. The secrets of a conspiracy can be withheld only so long before the audience starts demanding some answers, but once the cards are put on the table, suspense evaporates. The mythology now is deadly dull, even more so when a mythology episode is played out as a series of scenes of exposition.

Unless Carter and his writers can come up with a logical way to forestall the alien invasion (other than just ignoring it completely), this show is heading straight down a path already trodden by dozens of books, short stories, movies and other television shows.

Visually, the episode looks very good, filmed mostly in dark blues and grays. It's hard to do much with all those close-ups. But the scenes in the hangar are eye-poppers, with doors slowly opening and the aliens walking forward, obscured by the bright light. It's all very reminiscent of CLOSE ENCOUNTERS OF THE THIRD KIND, a great movie about humanity's encounter with aliens. If only THE X-FILES could reproduce that film's sense of wonder. THE X-FILES used to be about wonder, but there has been precious little of that lately.



A hanger delegation of Gray aliens, as the Syndicate—government and military officials—offer a U.S. flag in capitulation in "One Son."

"I heard gray is the new black."

—Mulder

ONE SON

★★

2/14/99. Written by Chris Carter & Frank Spotnitz. Directed by Rob Bowman. Editor: Louise A. Innes.

October 13, 1973. Members of the Syndicate,





Davis (r) with fellow regulars Nicholas Lea and Mitch Pileggi, savoring season seven's acting challenges.

there's an ongoing personal plot in relation to my son Spender."

Indeed—"Two Fathers" and "One Son" revealed more about the machinations and motivations of the character than his own episode, "Musings of a Cigarette Smoking Man," did back in the fourth season. Not only do we learn his name (CGB Spender), but we can see the pain he has caused his own former wife (Cassandra Spender) and son (Jeffrey)—not to mention, it is hinted, his biological daughter (Samantha). "It's terrific for me, really," he enthused, "because I'm moving from, I suppose, a traditional figure in the plot into being a real person, in a way. There's a lot of richness coming into the character. Things are being laid that show more and more different sides to the character, so for me it's getting more and more interesting."

At the time of our interview, Davis was unaware that the vast majority of the flashback scenes in "Two Fathers" and "One Son" would ultimately be cut from the broadcast episodes, according to guest actress Veronica Cartwright. "We did quite a lot of flashbacks to 1973," he said, "which is interesting, because you see the journey of the character, and an almost youthful enthusiasm to what one was doing, instead of this burnt-out thing he's become." Unlike several previous flashback episodes, on this occasion the more youthful Smoking Man is being played by Davis himself. "It's been more a question of giving us facelifts, actually," he explained, referring to Don S. Williams and Peter Donat's youthful visages in the scenes which survived Chris Carter's scissors. "We're all being remarkably

"I don't do as many kindly grandfathers as I used to play before X-FILES. [Recently] I was a nice guy trying to help everybody on VOYAGE OF TERROR."

—Actor William B. Davis

youthful—but then at the end of the night it's always quite depressing to rather rapidly age 25 years."

Although Davis said that, due to his X-FILES notoriety, casting directors tend not to offer as many "kindly grandfathers" as he used to play before THE X-FILES, he has managed to portray one "very nice guy" recently—in a made-for-television movie called VOYAGE OF TERROR, starring Lindsay Wagner, Martin Sheen and Brian Dennehy. "It was all about a virus taking over a ship," he said, "and I was this nice guy on shore trying to help everybody out. After that," he continued, "if it works out in terms of timing, I'm going to do a feature that's shooting in Toronto [KILLING MOON, with Penelope Ann Miller and Daniel Baldwin] about a virus loose on an aeroplane, rather than a ship," he chuckled, adding: "I'm not such a nice guy in that one. I also did a very interesting character in a student film for a young Canadian writer-director [Michael Zaidan] called THE LAST TZADDICK, which is a Jewish wise man. There were apparently 12 of them, and I play this crazy old patient in a spooky hospital where the lights don't quite work right because there's been an earthquake...it's a very sweet little film." □

government officials and military officials meet the Gray aliens in a hangar, offering the Grays a U.S. flag as a symbol of cooperation. Present day. A CDC team led by Diana Fowley breaks down the door to Mulder's apartment and hustles Mulder, Scully and Cassandra Spender to Fort Marlene in Maryland. After a decontaminating shower, Fowley apologizes to Mulder and Scully for the quarantine procedure, telling them that Cassandra has contracted a "highly contagious vectoring organism which produces a spontaneous breakdown and combustion" and is in full isolation. Before he leaves Fort Marlene, Mulder comes across the long-missing Marita Covarrubias (Laurie Holden), now a pathetic victim of Syndicate black-oil experiments. Marita tells him that the aliens will colonize immediately if they learn Cassandra is now a hybrid.

The problems of "Two Fathers" are repeated in "One Son." There's an alien invasion coming and Mulder just doesn't care. Who is this in Mulder's body and what have the writers done with the real Mulder? In this episode, it's Mulder who pales to Jeffrey Spender, amazingly enough.

There is little of the CSM/Spender interaction that gave "Two Fathers" some resonance, except at the end, when the CSM shoots his son. Poor Spender. He finally grows a spine and his reward is a bullet. The CSM is truly reprehensible. He sheds crocodile tears over the death of one's children ("impossible to imagine," he says in "Two Fathers") and then kills his son in cold blood. The CSM, who feels betrayed, is himself the betrayer. But the CSM's emotionless murder of his son loses its force, because the writers waffle. We hear the shot, but the action takes place off-screen. Yes, it's another X-FILES "did he or didn't he?" death. If the CSM didn't kill his son, then the scene has another meaning entirely, but for now it's all up in the air, and that means it has no meaning at all.

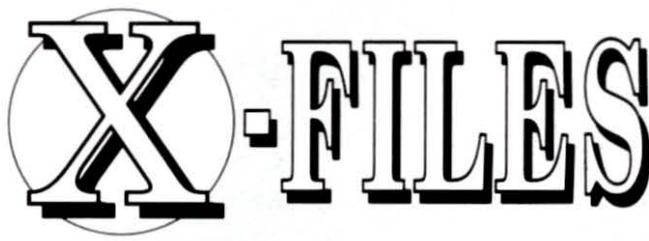
There is much running around in "One Son" but again, nothing much really happens. The biggest surprise in the two-parter is the return of Marita. This time Laurie Holden gets a chance to act. She is heart-breaking as the wretched woman who has become one of the Syndicate's guinea pigs. Unfortunately, she seems to have been brought back mainly as an information source for Mulder and Spender, and once she has served her function, she disappears.

Fowley, the X-FILES' Mata Hari, is also just a chess piece. There seems to be on her part some kind of weird attraction to the CSM, which is an X-file by itself. Mimi Rogers does a good job faking sincerity, but Fowley is a one-dimensional character.

Essentially, "One Son" is the producers' attempt to clean house by killing off the entire Syndicate. This group is a dramatic dead-end and no doubt the writers are bored to tears writing for them. Now the CSM and Krycek will be free to act without consulting this group of elderly white males, all of whom seem surgically attached to their club chairs. The big death scene is clumsily

Veronica Cartwright as Cassandra Spender, the key to the series' increasingly convoluted mythology, a Syndicate guinea pig in "One Son."





VERONICA CARTWRIGHT

As Cassandra Spender, she holds all the answers.

By David Hughes

The actress who plays Cassandra Spender came back from her latest alien abduction for the revelatory "Two Fathers/One Son" two-parter. But can she come back from the dead? "I couldn't wait to get back," enthused the actress, who claims not to have missed an episode since she first appeared as Cassandra Spender, a repeat abductee who also happens to be FBI Agent Jeffrey Spender's mother, in the "Patient X/The Red and the Black" two-parter.

As with all of THE X-FILES actors—even the regulars—she had no idea what to expect. "I had no idea I was going to be the first human/alien hybrid. Kind of cool though, huh?" She dissolves into fits of laughter. "Chris Carter is very secretive about his scripts," she adds unnecessarily, "and when I got the first one I was told to 'look at it with blind eyes.' And I thought, great, I'll just not put my glasses on!"

"It was kind of cool, though," said Cartwright. She's not kidding. After all, it isn't every day that a character who had only appeared in two previous X-FILES episodes learns that she is as important, if not more so, to the developing conspiracy (Chris Carter's "mythology") than Mulder's sister, Samantha. Not to mention the fact that, in a show with five-and-a-half years worth of questions, Cassandra Spender seems to be the one holding all the answers. "Yes, [she knows all] about the black oil, what it's made of, this thing called 'Purity,' why the faceless aliens have mutilated themselves so that they won't get infected—she's an absolute wealth of information."

As X-FILES actor Martin Landau pointed out, exposition is not necessarily an actor's best friend. "It didn't feel like exposition to me," said Cartwright. "It felt like I was trying to inform Mulder, because I really believe that he's a believer. Now, Bill, on the other hand," she added, referring to William B. Davis, who plays Cassandra's ex-husband, the Cigarette Smoking Man, and who relates several minutes' worth of



Cartwright as Spender feeding clues to Gillian Anderson as Scully in seventh season's "Two Fathers/One Son."

background throughout the "Two Fathers/One Son" two-parter, "that's exposition. But I guess they thought it was necessary, because we had shot a lot of stuff where we were younger, and then almost all of that stuff was edited out."

Noted Cartwright of the excised flashbacks, "I think Chris felt that it became a 'wig show,'" she said, "and it bothered him because he said—not so much on the women, but on the men—that people would not be watching the show; they would be watching the wigs. A lot of scenes were done where we were really a lot younger, especially between Bill and Peter [Donat], and I guess he just felt that people would not be paying attention to what was going on."

Cartwright revealed that another scene left on the cutting room floor took place between Cassandra's imprisonment in a hospital room by her son, Jeffrey, to her appearance at Scully's front door. "There was a scene where I was in the bathroom," she explained, "and I sneak out and go into the room where my guard is, and I look into the mirror and my face starts to morph, and I start to freak out. And then the lady who was my guard comes in and she says to me, 'Don't panic—you're The One,' and then she rips off her face and underneath [she] was a faceless alien! I don't know whether they felt that that re-

vealed too much too early, or whether it didn't work; but that's why I'm wearing the guard's clothes [in the next scene]. It would sort of set it up more that those faceless aliens needed me, and maybe they wanted to leave it a little more ambiguous."

Nevertheless, this scene—and the lengths which the faceless aliens have gone to protect Cassandra—has helped to convince Cartwright that we have not seen the last of her character. "I don't think I die," she states. "Not in that sense. I think I'm too important now. Those faceless aliens need me."

When Cartwright gets confused about the whole X-FILES mythology, she has the perfect person to turn to. "Bill Davis is the one," she says mischievously. "He is absolutely hysterical. He's got everything chronological, [and] he goes and he tells Chris when they're off!

For instance, in the flashback scenes, we didn't know whether or not we were supposed to be wearing wedding rings, because originally the dates had been much further in the past. And Bill said, 'Well, Jeffrey has to have been born at this time, so we should be wearing wedding bands,' and Chris said, 'Oh, you're absolutely right!' She broke down into peals of laughter again. "I'm telling you, he's got everything—he knows more than they do. Which, of course, is as it should be—he's the Cigarette Smoking Man!" Davis may be keen to get his facts straight after the continuity errors of "Musings of a Cigarette Smoking Man."

Cartwright approves of the show's move to L.A. "They've kept it dark, and all of those things. But it's never going to look like Vancouver, because there isn't any place like Vancouver."

Cartwright continues to watch THE X-FILES, although she still prefers the conspiracy/mythology episodes to the stand-alone investigations. "It's gotten a little schlocky again," she said. "Especially that one with the sea serpent ['Aqua Mala'], and the one about this big mud-pie ['Arcadia']. It was very odd—kind of like a 'swamp thing,' you know? Not that it wasn't fun to watch, but it was a bit ridiculous." □

contrived, allowing the CSM and Fowley to escape not because it makes sense, but because the show needs them to return at some point.

The writers may want to position "Two Fathers" and "One Son" as the turning point in the battle with the aliens, but in the end, it's an unpleasant story about the thoroughly contemptible CSM, the thoroughly contemptible group he works for, the thoroughly contemptible aliens, two ineffectual protagonists named Mulder and Scully, and the murder of a young man who dies because he finally saw the truth and asserted himself. A lot of people worked many long hours to bring "Two Fathers" and "One Son" to the screen, and as always, the visuals are first-rate. But even a terrific director like Rob Bowman cannot inject energy into this inert and depressing story.

"It's a good thing I have a reputation; otherwise, how could it be impugned?"
—Arthur Dales

AGUA MALA

★★

2/21/99. Written by David Amann. Directed by Rob Bowman. Editors: Lynne Willingham and Heather MacDougal.

A hurricane is pounding Goodland, Florida. Sarah Shipley is frantically boarding up her house, not against the storm, but against something much more fearsome. But her efforts are in vain. Tentacles reach out from her washing machine and kill her and her teenage son. Retired agent Arthur Dales, now living in a Florida trailer park, calls his new pal Fox Mulder and demands he come down to Florida to find out what's happened to his neighbors, the Shipleys.

"Agua Mala" won't end up on anybody's "best of" list, but it's so silly that it's sort of fun. We've got a vicious sea creature with long, deadly tentacles; we've got Mulder's cockamamie theory about the creature (which of course turns out to be correct); we've got a disapproving Scully; and we've got a passel of stereotypical characters—the looter, the hick, overweight sheriff's deputy (with a Southern accent, of course), the paranoid wacko with the guns, the smart-mouthed pregnant Hispanic woman and her cowed boyfriend with the thick accents—all of whom are completely ludicrous and unbelievable. And then there is the great Darren McGavin as Arthur Dales, fueled not only by the liquor but the very notion of an X-file nearby—a lot more fun here than he was in "Travelers." McGavin plays him with gusto.

Darren McGavin as retired agent Arthur Dales in "Agua Mala," Carter's casting homage to X-FILES' inspiration THE NIGHT STALKER.



"Something went wrong on this day the first time around."

—Pam

MONDAY

★★ 1/2

2/28/99. Written by Vince Gilligan & John Shiban. Directed by Kim Manners. Edited by Louise A. Innes.

Monday morning. Skinner rushes to the scene



Carol Burnett's daughter Carrie Hamilton as Pam, as the bank blows-up in "Monday," the X-FILES repetitive time loop take on GROUNDHOG DAY.

of a bank robbery/hostage-taking situation in Washington, D.C. He is approached by Pam (Carrie Hamilton), who addresses him by name, yelling to him he mustn't let this happen. Inside the bank, Scully holds Mulder, who has been shot and is bleeding to death. She tells the robber/shooter that he's in control—and he is, because he has a row of dynamite taped to his chest. A SWAT team swarms into the bank, and the robber flicks the switch on the bomb. The bank blows up.

It's Monday morning again. Mulder wakes to find a leak in his waterbed. And so it goes... acts two, three and four of "Monday" are variations on the theme of act one, with differences ranging from minor (Mulder trips over his sneakers at different times and in different ways, for instance, or the substance of Mulder and Scully's conversation changes when Mulder arrives late at the office) to major (we see more of Pam's life, we see Pam warning different people in each act). Suffice to say that the episode ends with Mulder, very much alive, looking at a front-page story in his Tuesday newspaper about the bank robbery. Something happens in act four to change the outcome and move time forward again.

Comparisons with GROUNDHOG DAY (and its forerunners the feature short 12:01 P.M., and the TV-movie 12:01, both based on a Richard Lupoff story) are inevitable, but irrelevant. "Monday" is ingenious and heart-wrenching. It pulls some of this season's best acting out of Duchovny and Anderson, and the two guest stars, Carrie Hamilton (daughter of Carol Burnett) and Darren Burrows as Bernard, Pam's boyfriend, are magnificent. "Monday" is an imaginative exploration of choice and free will, from the tiniest options (the words you use to greet your co-worker) to the biggest (Pam's fourth-act decision to enter the bank and endanger herself). To achieve each act's shifts of action and dialogue, director Kim Manners expertly employed different blocking and camera angles, and editor Louise A. Innes knit it all together so that no matter how many times we see the same scene, it always seems new.

"Wait a minute, you didn't let me carry you over the threshold."

—Mulder to Scully

ARCADIA

★★

3/7/99. Written by Daniel Arkin. Directed by Michael Watkins. Edited by Heather MacDougal.

If you ever wanted to see Mulder and Scully undercover as a married couple, this is the episode for you. Three couples have disappeared from the gated community of "The Falls" at Arcadia." Skinner assigns Mulder and Scully to the case. They are to pose as a young couple named Rob and Laurie Petrie (!), who are moving into the house of the last two victims, the Klines. All the neighbors profess ignorance as to the fate of the Klines and two other missing couples; relatives brought their disappearances to the attention of the FBI. Mulder and Scully soon realize that the residents of The

Falls are paranoid about obeying the community's Covenants, Contracts and Restrictions, known as the CC and R', enforced by a huge, black and slimy subterranean monster.

As monsters go, the "Übermenscher" is a poor example of the species. Dark lighting and editing can't hide the fact that he is a stuntman in a costume, although the CGI dissolution of the creature is effective. (As a creature of the underground, symbolizing the dark "underbelly"—that exists at the Falls—the Übermenscher falls squarely in the X-FILES tradition of buried secrets inevitably rising to the surface.) But there's simply nothing frightening about the Übermenscher, not only because it doesn't look scary, but because it represents the fears of a group of one-dimensional, unsympathetic people. (Watch FORBIDDEN PLANET for a far superior and subtler story about a monster that incarnates subconscious anxieties.)

Win (Tom Gallop) and Cami (Marnie McPhail), Gordy (Tim Bagley), the screeching Pat, even the Klines, who are dispatched in the teaser, are stereotypes of self-indulgent, insulated suburbanites. Furthermore, they are so lily-livered that they don't have the common sense to pack their bags and escape the garbage monster, nor will they stand up to a tinpot community dictator like Gene Gogolak (Peter White), an equally one-dimensional villain. Only Big Mike (Abraham Benrubi) comes off as something approaching a real human being.

The episode is most successful when it dwells on Mulder's bemused/annoyed reactions to the community, particularly in the scenes where he goads the neighbors with a pink flamingo, the trashing of the mailbox, basketball in the driveway and digging the yard for a reflecting pool. Everything in Mulder rebels against the rules and regulations of this Stepford-type community, and his actions, while humorous, contain an edge of anger and resentment that Duchovny gets across very well in his performance. If only Mulder's anger had been leveled against fully-drawn characters worthy of his ambivalent response to them.

Gillian Anderson and David Duchovny get domestic, undercover as a married couple investigating a sinister community in "Arcadia."



"Dog eats dogcatcher. It's all over the news this morning. It's sort of uplifting."

—Karin Berquist

ALPHA

★ 1/2

3/28/99. Written by Jeffrey Bell. Directed by Peter Markle. Editor: Heather MacDougal.

When a cargo ship bound from Hong Kong to San Pedro, California arrives in port, Dr. Ian Detweiler (Andrew Robinson), a cryptozoologist, is furious when he finds his rare Wanshang Dhole which he caught in China—an Asian canine once thought to be extinct—has vanished and two crewmen are also dead. Scully and Mulder meet Officer Jeffrey Cahn (named after X-FILES assistant editor Jeffrey Cahn), a Fish and Wildlife

X-FILES

DEAN HAGLUND

A talk with the Lone Gunman of comedy improv.

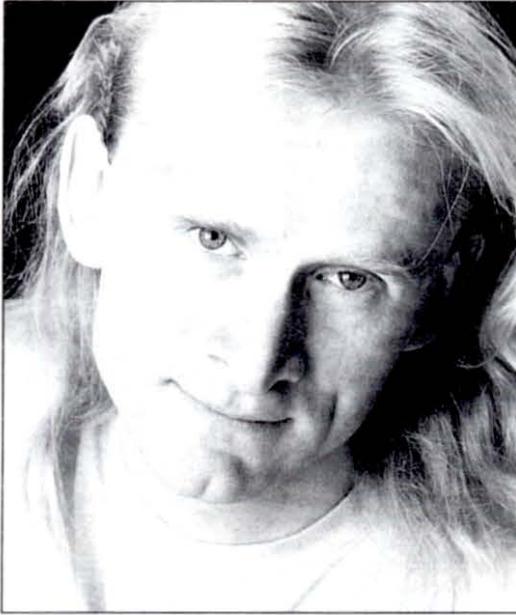
by David Hughes

Dean Haglund, who plays Lone Gunman "Ringo" Langly, is known to the show's fans for his hilarious improvised episode routine, which he delivers during convention appearances. Haglund said he developed the skit originally to audition for the show. Noted Haglund, "The agent who does all my stand-up comedy and 'improv' had sold Fox [on me]—'You gotta see this guy! He's hilarious!'—and said, 'Oh, just put together a little something that's X-FILES-related.' And I was like, 'Oh my God!' Haglund shuddered. "I started panicking, but came up with this improvised episode of THE X-FILES. I got invited to take it to comedy clubs and places like that, and it's been great ever since."

Haglund considers himself luckier than all of the other X-FILES cast and crew members who appear at conventions, chiefly because his background in stand-up comedy and improv has not only trained him to work in front of an audience, but to handle the unpredictable nature of a live event which invites feedback and interaction from the audience. Born in Manitoba, Canada, 33-year-old Haglund has long been involved with TheatreSports, one of his country's foremost comedy and improv groups and one which regularly tours comedy clubs across the United States. "I think I'm the most fortunate of all the cast members," he said, "because of my ability to get away from the show and go see how the show plays around [the country]."

So what impressions does he get? "I think it's hit a bunch of different nerves," he said. "Chris Carter was very smart in that he encapsulated a whole bunch of different, previously unrepresented subcultures. There's the conspiracy theorists; the occultists and people who really dig that sort of thing; the alien abduction people and the people who want to be abducted; and the military personnel who come up and say, 'You don't know how close the show is,' and you're like, 'Whoa, I don't wanna know!'"

Haglund finds the conventions to be an



Haglund, who plays Lone Gunman "Ringo" Langly, on transplanting his comedy routine from Vancouver to L.A.

invaluable resource for the character of Langly, whom he originally based on people he knows who work with computers. "From my University days I know a bunch of computer guys who are PhD types in the upper end of computer theory research, and I based my character on them," he explained. "All [of them] know really good rock bands—they're certainly not the 'pocket protector' types."

The just-completed sixth season provided an example of how a Lone Gunmen spin-off series might look, as Langly, Byers and Braidwood teamed up for a trip to Las Vegas in "Three of a Kind," originally titled "BRM." Langly made one or two other appearances sixth season—in "Triangle," "Dreamland" and "One Son"—and he and his fellow Lone Gunmen also happened to appear in last summer's X-FILES feature film, a fact which surprised no-one more than Langly himself.

"Isn't it weird seeing your head 40 feet tall?" he says, when asked about his reaction to the movie. "Three of the ugliest people who ever made it onto television are suddenly looming large over you. It was a

scary movie just for that!"

Like many other actors who play recurring characters on THE X-FILES, Haglund claims to follow the series closely, making sure he doesn't miss even the episodes in which he doesn't appear. So what have been his sixth season favorites so far? "I liked the one where the [guy's] head blows up if you go slower than 50 miles per hour," he said, agreeing that the episode in question, "Drive," had one of the best pre-title sequences in the show's history.

Asked about the show's sixth season move to Los Angeles, Haglund said that it has been relatively easy on the cast, but hard on the crew. "Everybody got used to working 16-hour days in Canada, and it's sort of like lifting weights," he muses. "After a while you forget that you're bench-pressing 200 kilos. But all of a sudden this new crew comes and it's the same work pace, and they're like, 'Uh, it's just this episode that's really hard, right? It gets easier?' And you go, 'Mmm, you know what? It doesn't get easier, you just get used to it!' Not only that, but Vancouver is a small city, and you can get to the rainforest in an hour. In LA, there's a three-hour drive just to get to the water, so every location [move] entails a huge amount of driving. In Vancouver, the producers and directors who were out-of-towners would get a hotel and a driver in a van who would come to pick them up at six a.m., and they would just fall asleep in the van and wake-up when they got to the set. Now, they all have to drive themselves, and they're all bleary-eyed when they get to the set. They're like, 'Is there any coffee?'" And yet the sixth season is arguably one of the best to date. "Yeah, that's why," he theorized with a chuckle. "It's because they're all sleepy, and that's exactly what they needed!"

With THE X-FILES having moved South for good, Haglund and his wife are ready to follow the show to its new home. "We were doing the commute back and forth, but it was getting crazy keeping two places, because you'd show up at the other house and be like, 'Oh my god, I haven't done the dishes here either!' We figured why not pack it all in and go down to LA." □

Service agent investigating the disappearance of the dhole. Meanwhile, another animal-attack type death has occurred, this time a customs agent and his dog.

"Alpha" is a run-of-the-mill monster-of-the-week episode. Duchovny and Anderson have little energy and the various victims (wildlife officers, a vet) are the X-FILES equivalents of STAR TREK's red shirt characters—they're in the plot to be killed, nothing more. The opening teaser is a portrait of stupidity in action; two crewmen think they've killed a vicious animal simply because it slammed against its crate? And then lift the lid and expose themselves to whatever is in there?

Genre favorite Andrew Robinson (STAR TREK: DEEP SPACE NINE) is wasted here as Dr. Detweiler. The bland doctor is a role that does not take advantage of Robinson's colorful, larger-than-life persona. We figure out quickly he's the murderous dhole, but we never see the anguish he must feel when he is in his human form. The one moment Detweiler comes to life is when he threatens Officer Cahn and tells him that if he kills the dhole, he (Detweiler) will kill Cahn; Robinson stares directly into the camera with blazing eyes. It's a startling moment.

The episode is particularly muddled with respect to dog breeder Karin Berquist, played by Melinda Culea, who previously worked with director Peter Markle on the TV-movie TARGET EARTH. A fine actress, she gives the alienated Berquist gravity and a sense of melancholy, but even she could not overcome the mixed signals of this script, which really have more to do with Scully than Berquist.

The writing for Scully is this episode's most serious flaw, in her attitude towards Berquist. Berquist talks about the dhole's need for territorial dominance, and the episode, in extremely unsubtle form, has Scully marking out her territorial dominance of Mulder. Every time a woman shows even a flicker of interest in Mulder, Scully's response is hostility and a barely-hidden jealousy. One begins to wonder if the writers really think women regard each other only as potential rivals and "tricksters," as Scully labels Berquist. Since she and Mulder are not romantic partners, Scully has no reason to display this jealousy (yet alone feel it), but there it is.

On the positive side, Bill Roe's misty lighting and the numerous tracking shots from the dhole's point of view are atmospheric and chilling. The morph of the silhouette of Detweiler into wolf is a hair-raising moment, and the dhole's disguise as a harmless Saint Bernard is a genuine surprise.

"Alpha" wants to explore the areas where human and animal meet, but because of poor character writing, it fails to offer any insights or even just a good story. Go watch THE WOLFMAN with Lon Chaney, Jr., or any good episode of BEAUTY AND THE BEAST for much more compelling explorations of this theme.

Andrew Robinson as Dr. Ian Detweiler, a powerful performance as a shapeshifting cryptozoologist in "Alpha," the X-FILES take on THE WOLFMAN.



John Diehl as Pinker Rawls in "Trevor," a psychopathic convict with the ability to pass through walls, seeking custody of his titular son.

"There's something so nice about putting on a brand new pair of socks."

—Pinker Rawls

TREVOR

★★1/2

4/11/99. Written by Jim Guttidge & Kea Hawryliw. Directed by Rob Bowman. Editor: Lynne Willingham.

A tornado is bearing down on a prison in Jasper County, Mississippi, and the inmates are trying to board up the buildings before it arrives. One inmate, Pinker Rawls (John Diehl) takes offense to another convict's teasing, and hammers a nail into his hand. The warden punishes Rawls by throwing him into an isolation box—virtually a death sentence in tornado weather. Naturally the tornado destroys the box and Rawls has vanished. Things get weird when the warden is found cut in two, each end of his torso carbonized. Mulder and Scully hear of this strange death and travel to the county morgue to examine the body.

Pinker Rawls is a dangerous man operating on instinct rather than rational thought. Guest star John Diehl (STARGATE) lets us see Rawls' lightning changes of temperament; this is a man who can speak softly to a child, then turn on a dime and beat a woman. It isn't Rawls' ability to pass through walls that is scary, but the threat of incipient violence he carries within him. Diehl underplays Rawls' rage, so when he does erupt, it is always shocking. He even gives Rawls a dry sense of humor; there's a malicious twinkle in his eyes. Also, Rawls' egoism makes credible his quest for the son he has never seen.

Catherine Dent and Tuesday Knight as sisters June and Jackie Gurwich are equally good. This episode proves that Hell hath no fury like a pair of Southern sisters bent on protecting a child. Rawls is reminiscent of Arnold Schwarzenegger's Terminator—nothing will stop him except death itself, and that it should come at the hands of the abused, terrified ex-girlfriend is a kind of justice, if not exactly the legal way to put Rawls away.

The X-File overall is a fragile one: Rawls is exposed to a tornado, and this gives him the power to emit electrical charges, walk through walls and change the physical composition of matter? The special effects are superb, particularly in the fake corpses department. The moment where Mulder pulls back a body to reveal the empty, ashy shell of his head is a real chiller. Production design is excellent and very detailed, most notably in a house after Rawls has trashed it. The lighting again is beautiful, especially in the scene where Rawls pursues Scully and Rawls son through backyards and rural pathways.

"To really write someone, I have to be in their head."

—Padgett

MILAGRO

★ 1/2

4/18/99. Story by Chris Carter. Teleplay by Frank Spotnitz & John Shiban. Directed by Kim Manners. Editor: Louise A. Innes.

A man sits alone in a sparsely furnished apartment, contemplating a typewriter and blank paper. The day passes and still he cannot write.

Finally he stands up, puts his hand inside his shirt—and brings forth his beating, bloody heart. The man is a writer named Phillip Padgett (John Hawkes), and he is Mulder's next door neighbor. He is obsessed with Scully and has moved into the apartment next to Mulder's because Scully's building was fully occupied.

X-FILES producer/writer Frank Spotnitz said in an interview in the show's official magazine that the writers identify with Mulder and love Scully. This strange statement reveals a lot about the way Scully has been portrayed the past two and a half years. For all the lip-service paid to Scully the strong FBI agent, the show has destroyed her as a human being and recreated her in the image of a romance novel female, with updating for our technological age. "Milagro" is another step in the process of exploiting Scully's femininity and sexuality for the sake of "character development." If the writers "love" Scully, then "Milagro" must be one of the most perverse valentines to a lead female character in television history.

It's a shame, because the idea behind "Milagro"—the relationship between writers and their characters—is basic to the art of writing, and the episodes captures very well the agony of writing and the joys of inspiration. In "Milagro," Phillip Padgett finds that what he writes, what he "imagines," becomes true in real life. Since this is THE X-FILES, of course Padgett's obsessions concern murder, specifically, murder by removal of the victim's heart. To fulfill Padgett's written desires, one of his characters, based on a deceased Brazilian "psychic surgeon" named Ken Naciamento, leaps off the page and into a kind of non-corporeal reality to commit the murders. The X-FILES production team gives "Milagro" (Spanish for "miracle") an extra-creepy spin—Padgett's spooky, empty apartment, Mark Snow's solemn heartbeat music (this episode has a marvelous, evocative score), the stateliness of the editing—the dissolves, the slow-motion, the camera held for an extra beat, and the throbbing, bloody, very realistic hearts.

In the episode's central scene, Padgett writes that Scully is compelled to visit him, and sure enough, she knocks on his door, chats with him a bit, then accepts his invitation to enter, even though, as she states during their conversation, every instinct in her tells her to flee. If Scully is acting under Padgett's authorial control, then the writers—Carter, Spotnitz, Shiban, and their character Padgett—have turned Scully into a puppet bereft of choice. On the other hand, if Scully is not under Padgett's control, then she is acting like an idiot, taking an interest in a man she knows is fixated on her, thinks he understands her and and is stalking her. This does not reflect a real-world situation and here the show has completely lost touch with its hard reality base, the function of which was to give credibility to the fantastic things Mulder and Scully encounter.

Mulder also suffers character destruction,

John Hawkes as Phillip Padgett, holding his beating heart from the teaser to "Milagro," a perverse Valentine for Scully from her admirers.



Scully encounter.

Mulder also suffers character destruction, regressing back to the thuggish Mulder of "Emily." He steals Padgett's mail, breaks into Padgett's apartment with gun drawn, inserts a spy camera into Padgett's room without a warrant, and assaults an innocent cemetery employee. He stalks Padgett, much as Padgett stalks Scully. Is he acting on his own or as Padgett directs? Again, we don't know, so Mulder is either his puppet, or just a brute.

As Scully contemplates the milagro Padgett delivered anonymously to Mulder's office, the camera contemplates her in lingering slow motion, dwelling on her face with opened mouth, her hands, her "titan" hair. This is not just Padgett eroticizing Scully (he's not even in the room, although we hear his voiceover), this is the show doing it! THE X-FILES (up to now) has always been careful to maintain its distance from a character's occasional acknowledgement of Scully's good looks. Here that distance is eradicated and the camera becomes complicit with Padgett. The effect is extraordinarily unpleasant and creepy, and serves even further to erase Scully as a human being and present her as a mere object of desire.

John Hawkes, who appeared with David Duchovny in PLAYING GOD and also had a role in Vince Gilligan's recent feature HOME FRIES, is a compelling, intense presence as Padgett. Despite a Herculean effort from Hawkes, Padgett comes off only as a loathsome creep with no inner life except for his fantasies.

Scully used to be THE X-FILES' moral conscience. Now we can't tell what she's even thinking, thanks to the fuzziness of "Milagro's" narrative and authorial (Carter's, not Padgett's) point of view. All we can glean is that she is drawn to interact with a stalker and the stalker more or less orders her murder, then in an act of "sacrifice," becomes her savior. The character assassination of Dana Scully is complete.

"I don't want to be no famous man. I just want to be a man."

—Josh Exley

THE UNNATURAL

★★★

4/25/99. Written and directed by David Duchovny. Editor: Lynne Willingham.

X-FILES star David Duchovny makes an auspicious writing and directing debut with "The Unnatural," a warm-hearted, moving story about the transforming effects of love—in this case, love for the game of baseball. It all begins back in 1947 Roswell, New Mexico, during a pick-up game between the Negro Leagues' Roswell Grays and a white team, the Southwest Stars. A group of mounted Klu Klux Klan thunder onto the field. They're looking for Grays' star Josh Exley (Jesse L. Martin), who the press has picked to be the next black baseball player to join the Major Leagues. The Southwest Stars beat several of the KKK with

M. Emmet Walsh fills in ably for the unavailable Darren McGavin as retired agent Arthur Dales, putting Mulder on the case in "The Unnatural."



X-FILES

LAURIE HOLDEN

The UNblonde on playing femme fatale Marita Covarrubias.

By David Hughes

Laurie Holden had barely appeared twice as the United Nation's sultry "special representative" Marita Covarrubias when she earned the nickname: "UNblonde"—both a reference to her government agency credentials and the fact that her platinum hair was fake.

"I think of her as a Mata Hari—you can't really read what she's saying or what her intentions are," 27-year-old Laurie Holden said of her on-screen alter ego, whose name means "yellow cave" and who could be classed as a classic femme fatale if only she hadn't turned from Mulder's link to the global conspiracy into a victim of ghastly government experiments.

"Laurie Holden is like a classic movie star," co-star David Duchovny enthused. "She's smoky, dangerous, sexy, and has so much in reserve. I'm hoping Mulder gets a little closer to [her]."

"I thought it was more interesting for Mulder's next contact to be a woman," Chris Carter—who had originally cast Deep Throat's replacement, "X," as a single girl—once said of Holden's character. "I wanted there to be some suspicion about whether Mulder would be involved with her romantically," he added, doubling the shock value of Covarrubias' recent tryst with Alex Krycek. Holden made her X-FILES debut in "Herrenvolk" and has since appeared further in seven episodes.

In "One Son," Covarrubias metamorphosed from the tough, icy career woman who leaked information to Mulder simply because she believed in him, to a desperate victim struggling to escape the fate which Smoking Man and his elderly cronies had in store for her. "I think that for myself—and I'm sure I speak for a lot of other [actors] on the show—that just when you think you've got it down, they're going to throw you a curve ball," said Holden. "Chris Carter's mind is so brilliant. A lot of people ask me if he makes up this stuff as he goes



Holden made her X-FILES debut in "Herrenvolk" and has appeared in seven other episodes, including "One Son."

along, and I don't think so. I think that when you watch the mythology, it is so specific, and the story is so precise, the way the different elements unfold in each new episode. I think that there is a 'master plan.'"

Holden claims no such thing for her own career, which effectively began in 1980 when her stepfather, British director Michael Anderson (AROUND THE WORLD IN 80 DAYS), cast her in the epic mini-series THE MARTIAN CHRONICLES when a child actress dropped out. "Everyone looked at me and said, 'Can she act?'" Holden recalled. "All of a sudden, I'm Rock Hudson's daughter." Holden developed a passion for acting in college. "I was always intrigued by it, but I thought it would be more of a hobby," she said.

Holden has appeared in the Michael Crichton thriller PHYSICAL EVIDENCE, TEKWAR: TEKLAB, and the Canadian-based series DUE SOUTH, which gave the young actress her first taste of cult television. Then, in 1996, the call came to audition for a part in THE X-FILES, which, she admitted, she had never seen, "although I'd heard wonderful things about it before." The show's trademark mysteries began even before she arrived at the audition.

"They faxed me three pages of sides," she recalled. "They wouldn't release a script, and the only information I had to go on was that I was a woman of intelligence and seriousness who worked for the United Nations. That was it. So I went in, and met with Chris Carter for just ten minutes, and by the time I got home, the ball was set in motion, and it was pretty much a done deal. I had no idea what I was getting into."

Since then, Holden has scarcely looked back. Now a firm fan of the series—like many X-FILES actors, she even watches the episodes she doesn't appear in—the actress believes that it is partly Chris Carter's attention to detail which makes the show work, even if it means costly reshoots. "If Chris Carter feels that a scene that has already been directed doesn't have the feeling that was intended, or if a certain nuance has been missed, he'll redo it," she revealed. "They reshoo stuff all the time, the second unit guys are on standby, 24/seven. So what you see on THE X-FILES is what Chris Carter wants you to see. He's a professional, and I love that about him."

In sixth season's "Two Fathers" and "One Son" two-part-er—the beautiful "UNblonde" becomes somewhat UNkempt, thanks to the lasting effect of infection by the black oil known as "purity." "[Marita] has evolved in a really interesting way in the three years that I've been involved with the show," Holden understates, "but I was just thrilled with 'One Son,' because with the exception of the kiss with Nic Lea, it was the first time you saw this cold, emotionless, private woman suddenly so vulnerable, exposed and raw. I loved the fragility and the vulnerability." Was she feeling fragile and vulnerable herself, having a Bad Hair and Bad Skin Day added to the discomfort of some serious contact lenses? "Well, I did a show called POLTERGEIST: THE LEGACY, so I'd done some of that before," she said. "My



The 27 year-old actress at the People's Choice Awards. Her enigmatic persona turned tragic in the show's sixth season.

If Chris Carter feels a scene doesn't have the feeling that was intended, or if a certain nuance has been missed he'll redo it. They reshoo all the time. ☺

—Laurie Holden, Actress

eyes were red from the contacts, but then my eyes were pretty red from the makeup and from the state that I was in! I loved that, though," she added, clearly enjoying the opportunity to play down her natural beauty. "I was like, 'make me more tired! Make me uglier! I love this!'"

No one was more surprised at the sudden revelations about Marita than Holden herself, who had established a backstory of her own for her character in order to play her realistically. "Chris Carter told me that he wanted to keep her an enigma: 'I never want to see you feel, show empathy or compassion.' So I have never really had anything to go on, except what I brought to the playing field. I think I've always felt that Marita had a secret, and in 'One Son,' when we see Marita exposed for the first time, a lot of my inner work about who this woman was was revealed. I've never seen Marita as a horrible person," she added, "although I know that there are a lot of X-FILES fans who get a little bent out of shape when they think I'm going to come between Mulder and Scully."

In other words, Holden has always believed her character to be one of the good guys, despite her unpleasant connections with Cigarette Smoking Man and her apparent attraction to Krycek. "Marita had to do that—she had to kiss Krycek," she said, recalling her earlier description of Marita's resemblance to Mata Hari. "That was not a passionate moment for Marita—it was what she needed to do in order to carry out her mission." She paused. "Well, I may have enjoyed it a little bit..." She laughed guiltily. "Or as Nic Lea would say, 'that was a good day in the life of Krycek.' David actually teased me about that when we worked together on 'One Son,'" she revealed. "He said, 'What's going on? You're kissing Krycek now?' And I looked at him with my moldy teeth and my cracked lips, and I said, 'Hey, Mulder, now's your chance!' □

their balls and when their coach pulls the hood off the unconscious leader, they're all stunned to find an alien Gray.

In 1999, Mulder is at the office researching old newspaper archives and happens on a photo of a young Arthur Dales with Exley; and off to the side of the photo is a man Mulder knows as the alien Bounty Hunter (Brian Thompson). Mulder goes to Dales' decrepit apartment for an explanation, but finds his brother, also named Arthur Dales (M. Emmet Walsh) in residence.

If "The Unnatural" is any indication, David Duchovny proves he is a triple threat. Not only is he a fine actor, but he has the potential for a standout career as a writer and director. No doubt he received a great deal of assistance from the show's producers and editor Lynne Willingham, but "The Unnatural" has an unabashed emotionalism without false sentimentality and an understanding of human (and alien) foibles that gives it a unique stamp. Duchovny once said in an interview that he felt THE X-FILES was about the light, not the dark, and in "The Unnatural," he finds the light and the wonder of the paranormal, which on this show is usually manifested in darkness and cynicism.

"The Unnatural" also brings us another great X-FILES character in the person of the second Arthur Dales. Originally, the character was supposed to be Darren McGavin's Dales, but McGavin had to drop out at the last moment and so that other marvelous character actor, M. Emmet Walsh, took his place. Although the business about the family having two brothers (and a sister) named Arthur is a bit forced, it doesn't really matter. What matters is that brother Arthur is one of those larger-than-life characters who occasionally pop up out of THE X-FILES' laidback landscape. He's eccentric, he's cantankerous, he's a mess, he drinks too much, but within him lie the sparks of his passion for baseball and the memory of his friend Exley. He's unforgettable, and M. Emmet Walsh brings him to exuberant life. One wonders what McGavin would have done with this role if he hadn't had to bow out, but it's hard to imagine he'd be any better than Walsh.

The writing for Mulder and Scully in their two scenes together is wonderful, too. Duchovny respects their specific personalities, but also delineates their bond in the playful way they tease each other and then come together through baseball at the end. This is Mulder and Scully at their most human.

And then there's Exley. Jesse L. Martin is superb, a charmer with an infectious smile—he gives Exley the star charisma of a great baseball player—but he is equally adept at showing Exley's serious side: his passion for baseball and need to exult in the things that baseball means. When Exley is mortally wounded, and his blood gushes forth red, it's one of those magic moments where the event may have no logical explanation, except that the longings of the heart find expression in physical transformation. Geppetto and Pinocchio would understand. And there are many more magical moments in "The Unnatural."

Exley shows his true self as a Gray alien in "The Unnatural," actor David Duchovny's writing and directing debut on one of the series' finest shows.



that explores several different themes and neatly ties them together. It is, of course, a hymn to the joys of baseball, as pure game and as a metaphor for life. It is a tribute to the Negro Leagues. It is about the need to connect, showing us how totally different people (and aliens!) can not only find something in common, but realize there is much to admire in each other. It is about racism, a subject Duchovny could have trod over like an elephant, but instead, gives it the light touch: Exley the alien doesn't become a black man in some heavy metaphor about African-Americans as aliens in a white-dominated society; he becomes a black man because playing in the Negro Leagues is the easiest way to play his beloved game and avoid attention. And because he loves who he becomes, he stands up for all the groups he has joined: African-Americans, baseball players, and humanity itself.

Above all, "The Unnatural" is about the power of story-telling. We don't really know if Dales' story is true or if it's the liquor-fueled ramblings of a broken-down man, but in the end, this is irrelevant. As pure story, it speaks the truth and that truth makes a difference, especially to Mulder, who feels the rare need to connect with humanity. And he makes that connection, as Exley did, through baseball. Let's hope that Duchovny writes and directs another episode for THE X-FILES' seventh (and final) season.

"Go brush your hair, Michael Bolton!"
—Jimmy the geek to Langly

THREE OF A KIND ★★ 1/2

5/2/99. Written by Vince Gilligan & John Shiban. Directed by Bryan Spicer. Editor: Heather MacDougal.

The Lone Gunmen pinch hit for Mulder, or to be more precise, David Duchovny, who was occupied with "The Unnatural" during the shooting of "Three of a Kind." "Three of a Kind" is a sequel to the previous Lone Gunmen episode, last season's "The Usual Suspects," and is a somewhat diverting entertainment, although it offers nothing new, other than a zonked-out-on-drugs Agent Scully. Our paranoid trio, Byers (Bruce Harwood), Langly (Dean Haglund) and Frohike (Tom Braidwood) venture out to the bright lights and glitz of the Las Vegas Strip. Their mission: wrest top-secret info from the government defense contractors at their annual Def-Con '99 convention. Byers has a second agenda—he's still looking for his lost love, government chemist Susanne Modeski (Signy Coleman).

If ever there were three fish out of water, they are the Lone Gunmen in Las Vegas. The episode, unfortunately, does not make much of the incongruity of dropping this socially awkward, politically paranoid trio into such a glittery and superficial setting. Except for a few scenes in the casino or on the street, most of the story could have taken place in Anywhere, U.S.A., since Las Vegas hotel rooms, hallways and conference

Want a light?—Scully is surrounded by her admirers in "Three of a Kind," a Mulderless show plotted to give Duchovny time to write and direct.



Mulder and Scully hallucinate intriguingly while being ingested by giant mushrooms in "Field Trip," a re-set button show with extra cheese.

spaces are as impersonal as those anywhere else. The story is by-the-numbers and predictable. Of course Susanne shows up and she and Byers separate at the end. The one surprise is minor, when Timmy the geek (John Billingsley) turns out to be Timmy the government agent, and that happens early on.

Bruce Harwood is the only Lone Gunman who has any opportunity for real acting and he brings a naive sweetness to the role of the lovestruck Byers, a man who can carry a torch for ten years. Signy Coleman repeats the role of Susanne Modeski with her usual cool layered over her more tumultuous emotions. The farewell between the two is as expected, and what should have been an emotional scene comes off as uninvolved. Able comic actor, Charles Rocket, is always a pleasure to watch, but Ellis, his government agent, is a cardboard character. Director Bryan Spicer, who has directed several genre television shows and two poorly-received features (MCRALE'S NAVY and FOR RICHER OR POORER), does an adequate job, but all in all, this is a filler episode, more substitute than the real thing.

"Scully, in six years, how often have I been wrong?" —Mulder

FIELD TRIP ★★ 1/2

5/9/99. Written by Vince Gilligan & John Shiban. Directed by Kim Manners. Editor: Louise A. Innes.

Mulder has come upon an intriguing case. The skeletons of a young couple, Angela and Wallace Schiff, have been discovered near Brown Mountain, North Carolina. The Schiffs had been missing for only three days and temperatures never rose above 70. What could account for the condition of the bodies?

There have been a plethora of never-really-happened episodes this season—we've had hallucinations, visions, a warp in the time-space continuum that can reverse time, etc., etc., and "Field Trip" falls neatly into this category. It might have had a greater impact if it didn't suffer from "reset button syndrome." And the basic premise has extra cheese (and mushrooms): Mulder and Scully are being devoured by a giant, man (and woman)-eating fungus! To paraphrase Mulder, sounds like crap when one says it.

But "Field Trip" is sort of fun. It delivers a decent mind-screw, although the writers tip their hand far too early in the game. We figure out pretty quickly that Mulder and Scully are hallucinating. "Field Trip" won't blow your mind with profound or original exploration of the boundaries between reality and hallucination, because what's happening is quite obvious.

Although the episode doesn't do much with its reality/hallucination premise, it does offer a bit of a character study with the running theme of "Sounds like crap when you say it." This is Mulder's statement to Scully after his initial discussion of the Schiff case and she repeats his theory back to him in dubious Scully-speak. In "Field Trip," both Mulder and Scully have their exact words repeated

back to them, and they do sound like "crap" when they hear how they sound in the mouth of others.

Still, "Field Trip" offers many pleasurable moments, even if we know they're not real. The scene where Mulder shows Scully the alien is wondrous and Gillian Anderson is especially moving. She plays perfectly Scully's response to being proved completely wrong on everything. She is not angry; she is amazed and thrilled at what seems like a miracle. The moment when Mulder finds Wallace Schiff is a shock and their scenes in the cave are lit with a gorgeous dark aqua tint that contrasts startlingly against the bright lights of the unseen aliens' ship.

The wake in Mulder's apartment is extremely eerie, with its dreamy camerawork and Scully's growing realization that the world has turned topsy-turvy. Among the actors, Duchovny and Anderson are the prime pleasures; guest stars David Denman (Wallace Schiff), Robyn Lively (Angela Schiff) and the coroner (Jim Beaver) are quite good. If only some of this had happened for real.

"You're a liar...you're both liars."

—Scully to Skinner and Fowley

BIOGENESIS

★ 1/2

5/16/99. Written by Chris Carter & Frank Spotnitz. Directed by Rob Bowman. Editor: Heather MacDougal.

Dr. Solomon Merkallen (Michael Chinyamurindi), a biologist at the Université Côte D'Ivoire, Ivory Coast, has found matching pieces of a strange artifact he believes of extra-terrestrial origin. When he holds them together, they suddenly fuse and fly across the room and lodge in a Bible at a passage from Genesis. Merkallen travels to the United States to meet Dr. Sandoz, a biologist at American University in Washington, D.C., but he quickly realizes the man he meets is an imposter. The imposter kills Dr. Merkallen. Skinner is advised of the murder and assigns the case to Mulder and Scully. Mulder has heard of both scientists and says they espouse Panspermia, a theory that life originated outside this solar system and began here when microbes were blasted onto Earth.

Imagine if someone took the script to "Anasazi"—one of the best X-FILES episodes



Scully on the beach in the Ivory Coast, looking at the barely submerged alien ship of "Biogenesis," a by-the-book season-ending finale cliffhanger.

ever—changed the plot a bit, and then stripped it of virtually all human interest. You'd end up with "Biogenesis," which features the usual season finale business of Mulder and Scully uncovering clues to Something Really, Really Big About Aliens, Mulder and Scully running around a lot trying to Figure It Out, Scully questioning Mulder's dogged pursuit of The Truth while she sticks stubbornly to Denying the Existence of Aliens, Krycek and other conspiracy types murdering People Who Know Important Stuff, the Cigarette Smoking Man puffing away, Mulder getting Really Sick, some Spiritual Stuff, and two—not just one, but two!—Monologues

X-FILES

MARTIN LANDAU

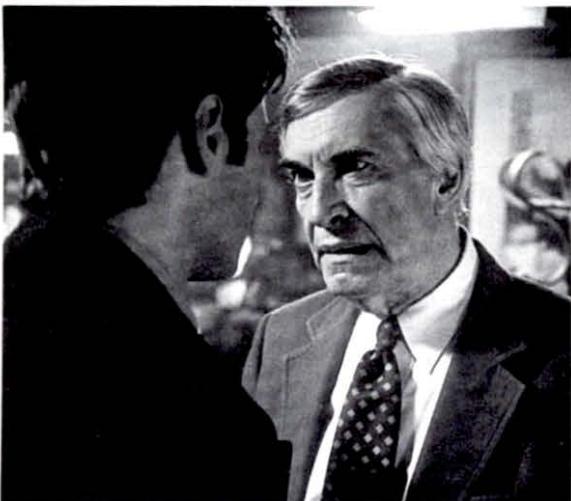
Still waiting in the series' wings?

By David Hughes

Having convinced Martin Landau to play persecuted conspiracy theorist Dr. Alvin Kurtzweil in *THE X-FILES MOVIE*, Chris Carter recut the film so that the character—who, in the original script, was murdered by the Well-Manicured Man (John Neville), might live to fight the future another day. At least, that's what Landau, who celebrated his 70th birthday the same week *THE X-FILES MOVIE* opened last summer, likes to think. "It's quite possible," the veteran actor said with a chuckle. "We do see the trunk [of the Well-Manicured Man's car] being closed, but we don't know for sure that I'm in it; we do see John Neville's character being blown up in that car, but Kurtzweil may not even be in the car when it happens. One never knows with Chris, so I don't know for sure whether I am deceased or not. When I saw the film, one of the first questions many people asked was, 'Did you die?' or 'Are you coming back?' and I can't answer that. And, you know, I'm not sure if Chris can answer that—I think maybe he has an idea that he hasn't shared with anybody yet."

Before the movie opened, Landau, like his co-stars, had been sworn to secrecy about the plot; indeed, since he had only read the pages his character appeared in, he probably wouldn't have been able to leak information if he had wanted to. "When I first got the script," he revealed, "it was printed on dark red paper, with my name emblazoned in dark letters and a number underneath my name on every page, so that it would be virtually impossible to Xerox. I read enough to know that it was a good script, and I appreciated Chris Carter and his team's desire for secrecy."

Landau said that his primary concern before accepting the role was whether or not the film would work for people who had never seen *THE X-FILES* on television. "My fears were allayed completely. It was a



Landau as conspiracy theorist Dr. Alvin Kurtzweil, dumping all that exposition on David Duchovny in *X-FILES: THE MOVIE*.

good movie unto itself." His next concern was, he added, the character of Kurtzweil himself. "When I read the script, I said, 'My God, there's reams of information this guy gives!' It's a lot of exposition, [and] exposition is not an actor's best friend. Every scene I have is one in which I talk about viruses, and subterfuge, and conspiracies, and very often it's what isn't said that creates your character. So there's not a lot of time to create too much mystery when you're doling out plot, and very complicated plot!"

"But when Chris talked to me, he said something that kind of challenged me and interested me: he said, 'The reason I'm asking you to do this is because I want the character to be crazy and credible at the same time.' And I said, 'Wait a minute, if you're crazy, you're not credible. And if you're credible, you're not crazy!' But he said, 'I know you can do that!' 'With this dialogue? Okay... let me think about this.' I found it an interesting challenge, and that's why I wanted to do it—because it wasn't easy. I also wanted to create a certain amount of sympathy for the guy. I wanted the audience to actually, somehow, feel sorry for him in the midst of all this madness, because even paranoids have real enemies!"

Concerning Profound Matters of Life and Death.

It's hard not to get cynical when an episode is so completely formulaic. None of the deaths matter in "Biogenesis." Once each guest character—Dr. Merkallen, Dr. Sandoz—has fulfilled his function in the plot, he is killed off (while he's on the phone, of course). The actors who play Sandoz and Merkallen are very good, and they bring a bit of humanity to each of these men, but nevertheless, the characters are cardboard.

Then there's all this alien business. Apparently the aliens who want to invade and colonize us have put their plans on hold since "Two Fathers" and "One Son." Most likely the writers will come up with something next season to explain why the aliens have decided not to invade and it will all fade away. For all the uncertainties of the alien invasion/alien artifacts storylines, they are generic plots. They could be from any science fiction story about humanity's contacts with aliens. None of this has the power of this series' original premise. Mulder and Scully searching for Samantha and the truth are far more compelling than Mulder and Scully fighting off an alien invasion.

And Mulder gets sick. In the original "Biogenesis" script, we learn the virus from the Tunguska experiments years ago is the cause, but that bit of continuity was cut out in favor of the suggestion the rubbing is to blame. Let's hope the Tunguska germ turns out to be the real culprit; otherwise, we need an explanation how a piece of paper can switch on abnormal activity in Mulder's brain. Supposedly Mulder's illness will have some greater meaning, but for now it's just a way to inject some tension into an otherwise by-the-numbers episode and also move it along; this illness seems to give Mulder the power to sense things and hear voices.

The final shot says it all—it looks great (nice spaceship!), but it's ridiculous. Scully goes to the Ivory Coast and with guidance from the local fisherman, finds a huge spaceship a few inches underwater, right out of the *X-FILES* feature film. You would have to have severe visual impairment not to see this ship. Why isn't the entire world flocking to this spot? Will Scully finally have that change of heart and admit there are aliens? Or will someone prove to her the ship is of Earthly origin? Find out next season.

Since there is only one season left of *THE X-FILES*, now is the time to say: Give Scully her own office before the series ends. It's been made very clear that Mulder's office is his office and no one else's (Mulder says so himself in "Biogenesis"). Where does Scully park her briefcase, her coat, her files, her computer, her mug with decaf coffee, her nameplate? What kind of posters does she put up on the wall? It's hard to imagine what the writers could do to make up for Scully's behavior in episodes like "Milagro" or "Alpha," or her questioning of Mulder in "Biogenesis," but giving her an office would be a beginning.

Michael Chinyamurindi as Dr. Solomon Merkallen, examining the alien artifact in "Biogenesis," invoking Biblical mythology as part of the SF mix.



ROBERT CONRAD WILD WILD WEST

The series star sets the record straight on the Warner Bros. big-budget remake.

By Craig Reid

Robert Conrad, a.k.a. Jim West, wasn't a fan of Warner Bros.' big-budget summer remake. "I read the script of the movie and it's very disappointing," he said. Contrary to rumors, Conrad was not offered the part of Ulysses S. Grant in the film.

"They leaked it to the press that they were going to be offering me this role," said Conrad. "I think what they were doing was testing the waters. I did meet with Sonnenfeld and Jon Peters. My meeting with Sonnenfeld was blah. It was a courtesy on his part. When I didn't drop to my knees and kiss his ring after MEN IN BLACK, I think he had enough of me. And when I met Jon Peters, it was Hollywood hype at its worst."

Conrad said Peters told him, "You must be in this movie." Noted Conrad, "You know, there are a lot of decent, honest people in this community. Don Meyer, Brandon Tartikoff, Frank Price who ran Columbia, but every once in a while, you meet a jive-ass....and Jon Peters is a jive-ass, but I did want to do the film because he is such a talented hair dresser. I thought it would be great in between takes he could maybe do my hair."

"He alleges to be a martial artist. He told me he was a martial artist and I find that suspect. But if he would ever like to prove it, I am certainly available."



Conrad with Ross Martin as partner Artemus Gordon and Jo Ann Harris as Carmelita Loveless in THE WILD WILD WEST REVISITED (1979), a TV movie.

Conrad's glare and stare says it all. "I'm not thrilled with the casting for all three roles for a variety of reasons. I didn't have to 'be in the movie.' And as it is I'm going to France when they start to hype the film. I have enough ego to say that I don't want to have people think I'm bitter. Because they'll never do the 104 episodes. I don't care how many movies they make, they'll never get there. I thought the film could have been an opportunity for those people, the aficionados of the show, to be able to see the '90s version. And in all honesty I would have liked to make a contribution to that off-camera if there wasn't something I felt I wanted to do on camera.

"I'm a pilot and have my

own two planes. I flew in for the interview to meet the director with the understanding I was not going to be reading for this role. Of course the meeting went well and they said, 'Would you be kind enough to read?' I said that I wouldn't but I'd be happy to read the menu of any great restaurant that you would like to take me to celebrate my getting this role. [Laughing] I didn't get the role."

Conrad offered his thoughts on what Peters and Sonnenfeld planned to do with staging the film's action. "Terry Leonard is the coordinator and he worked on the WWW and he's subsequently gone on to be hot. Will Smith may be athletic but they are not going to get there. I did it all. And Will is going to do

that?"

It was also rumored that Conrad was bent out of shape because Jim West was going to be black. "The African-American casting should not be an issue," said Conrad. "I think the casting of Smith is the issue. I appreciate his popularity; however, I'd prefer an actor with more athletic prowess. He's a good comedian but just not my choice to play my role. Best would be a Wesley Snipes body with a Denzel Washington head. When I did the show, I had black actors like Rip Swain, a stuntman and friend of mine, Cal Brown and Sammy Davis, Jr. All these actors were in the show because they were actors. We never dealt with that issue. There is a reference in [the original script] to a racial slur. I hope it's not in the final version. I said, 'Why are we going in this direction? Why not just play James West black without explaining it?' I've had a wonderful relationship over the past 40 years with the black community, but I am not going to say, 'Yeh, Will, cool, he de man.' He ain't the man."

"Michael Dunn did such a great job playing Dr. Loveless, and he was by far the best villain on the show. There are so many talented dwarfs but they wanted Kenneth Branagh. He was in HAMLET. It was tedious and tough for me to stay awake, I kept looking for Mel [Gibson]. I don't mean to slam dunk him but it was kind of lost. I've nev-



Conrad as James T. West, undercover agent for President Ulysses S. Grant in 105 amazing stunt-filled episodes of the CBS series that aired from 1965-1970.

er seen Kevin Kline but I know he kissed Tom Selleck and Larry King. He is not Ross Martin. Kevin Spacey or Gary Sinese. Bottom line is the cast. Sonnenfeld is hot. They've put lots of pre-production money into it. On paper it looks good....Well, maybe not."

Born as Conrad Robert Falk, when he was 22 Warner Brothers changed his name to Robert Conrad. He appeared in his first TV series HAWAIIAN EYE which ran from 1959-63. Conrad was formerly a milkman in the San Leandro Valley and was used to getting up at 4:00 am, and swinging bottles over his shoulder. It was this sort of work ethic, keeping-in-shape mentality that ultimately would prepare him for the role of Captain James T. West. But he was not really a trained stuntman and at a time when stars would refuse to even take a punch or fall down without a double, why did he put upon his shoulders to start doing everything himself?

"When the show started there was lots of action in there, and they were taking forever and we had a stunt co-

ordinator and a lot of guys standing around talking, drinking coffee and the cameras weren't rolling and we were over budget. I saw this actor get knocked off a horse and I said, 'I'm going to get the horse and get knocked off.' I had done some stunts in my career. My deal was I'd say a line and do a stunt. It was economically feasible. I was an athlete and agile and I did the stunt. Then I'd say move the camera here and there, now we have coverage, now put in the

Conrad rigged to explode on crates of dynamite in "The Night of the Human Trigger," defusing a pendulum mechanism set to blow him to kingdom come.



NOT SPLITTING HAIRS

"There are a lot of decent, honest people in this community," said Conrad. "but every once in a while you meet a jive-ass, and [producer-hairdresser] Jon Peters is a jive-ass."

actor and all of a sudden we started to move and instead of doing John Wayne fights we did more avant garde kind of farcical fights. High camp.

"I said, 'let's go for the martial arts, karate, kung-fu sort of stuff. I was studying with John Leoni. But you know it wasn't WWW that was the first to have martial arts introduced on TV but it was with my other show HAWAIIAN EYE. The stuntman who did fight scenes with me was Robert Herron and he came from a distinguished stunt family. He was a boxer and I'd just say, 'You do your stuff and I'll do mine. Just throw your punches like you would.' He'd throw a straight punch and I'd block it like [martial arts]. Then martial arts became more prominent with Bruce Lee when he did GREEN HORNET.

"But then they started giving out awards to every actor who could do three moves, so then I said, 'Ah, now I'm going back to boxing and brawling.'"

Conrad's method worked well until he had an accident, a stunt that went awry and held up production for 12 weeks? "Normally when we would do a fight or an action stunt, we would do it in one take," he said. "And the time when we

did it more than once, it was the accident. I broke my skull in 1968 because we did two takes. And today, there is still a dispute as to whether Jerry Laveroni was late or whether he lost his heart. I think he was late. I was jumping onto the chandelier, I was doing an 'L' and he was to stop my forward momentum. We were slow on the first take and there was a stuntman named Terry Crampston from England, a great stuntman. So he was watching. I felt like I wanted to show the Brits what we were up to. So I said, 'Let's do it again.' And we did it again. The timing was off, my hands slipped and I fell onto the solid cement. The show stopped. I had this 6-inch linear fracture and had a high temporal concussion and I was in big trouble. But I survived.

"So when I came back for the fourth season I was limited to what I could do for insurance reasons. There was never a conversation about the accident. I've always been the kind of man that adheres to authority, marginally. My first yes is not always my last yes. So I agreed and gradually I did all the fights but couldn't do anything five feet off the ground and of course that went out the window."

And what price has he paid? "I've many problems with my neck now, progressively worse with age. I'm always in some minor pain, I don't know what it's like to be healthy with my neck and spine. When you say, 'Hey Bob,' you'll see me turn slowly. If I turn too fast, it's painful. Fights are a bitch because you have to snap your neck. Bottom line, was it worth it? The answer is 'Absolutely.' If I've got to live with a little pain and have someone like Jackie Chan be so supportive of what I've done, that's good enough for me. Because Chan is the man." □



"You meddler, interfering meddler. You vile, egregious Secret Service man."

—Loveless (to West)

THE NIGHT THE WIZARD SHOOK THE EARTH

1965. B&W. Produced by Fred Freiberger. Directed by Bernie Kowalski. Written by John Kneubuhl.

Michael Dunn makes his debut as the deranged dwarf Dr. Miguelito Loveless, with giant gofer Voltaire (Richard Kiel). Dunn sings a duet with his henchwoman sidekick Antoinette (Phoebe Dorin). Holding 5000 settlers hostage with a clock tower rigged with dynamite, Loveless demands the state of California, which belonged to his ancestors. With Leslie Parish as Loveless' cohort Greta.

Producer Freiberger remembered, "We had Michael [Dunn] jump onto this swinging pendulum on the clock. When he landed he hit himself in the balls and, boy, was he in pain. That ended him wanting to do all his own stunts from then on."

WILD WILD WEST EPISODE GUIDE

By Craig Reid

Together, the natty and nervy James T. West and the resourceful master of disguises Artemus Gordon adventurously and bravely prevented dastardly villains and intellectual madmen from taking over America or the world in 104 episodes from 1965-1969. Here's a survey of some of the best episodes.

"No one would ever expect a fat Chinese of being a revolutionary."

—A dying Wing Fat (aka Juan Manolo) (to West)

THE NIGHT OF THE INFERNAL (PILOT)

1965. B&W. Produced by Michael Garrison. Directed by Richard Sarafian. Written by Gilbert Ralston.

Washington's best Secret Service agent Captain James T. West is asked to pose as an Army deserter in order to secretly meet President Grant (James Gregory). He's told that Mexican revolutionary Juan Manolo is creating havoc in the Southwest Territories and he must be stopped. Travelling aboard his newly acquired, souped up train, The Wanderer, West arrives in the recently raided town of Quemeda, New Mexico and is greeted by his assigned partner Artemus Gordon. Victor Buono plays Manolo, disguised as fat Chinaman Wing Fat, with Suzanne Pleshette as his casino partner Lydia Montreno.

Director Sarafian humorously recalled, "When Bob threw that sort of spear at Buono, rather than ejaculate a shout of pain, he let out with the tiniest, little whimper. It was like 'ooo.' That was funny."

Victor Buono plays Manolo, a Mexican revolutionary disguised as Chinaman Wing Fat in the 1965 series pilot "The Night of the Inferno."



Conrad's West tries karate on Charles Horvath as Iron Foot in "Night of the Glowing Corpse," like all first season shows, filmed in black & white.

"Le Yankee. Formee-dah-bull."

—Consul-General Potez on West and Gordon leaving a meeting with beautiful women

THE NIGHT OF THE GLOWING CORPSE

1965. B&W. Produced by Fred Freiberger. Directed Irving J. Moore. Written by Henry Sharp.

When an intelligent Frankenstein-like man (Charles Horvath) karate-kicks down metal bars to help Frenchwoman Amelie (Marion Thompson) steal the powerful, French-invented, radiating substance called "franconium," West is blamed.

This was the first of 25 episodes that the late Irving J. Moore directed. Said Conrad, "I worked with Irv on an earlier show I did called HAWAIIAN EYE and I was happy to have him onboard the show." Iron-foot Horvath returns as the sword-swinging Sultan guard Gombal in the second season's "The Night of the Gypsy Peril."

"There should be a law against educated women."

—Gordon (to West)

THE NIGHT OF THE STEEL ASSASSIN

1966. B&W. Produced by John Mantley. Directed by Lee H. Katzin. Written by Calvin Clements.

As West enters a sailor shop on the wharf, he witnesses the death of a man named Gilbert at the hands of an assassin named Torres (John Dehner), who is part steel and part human. West's attacks are futile as bullets harmlessly bounce off his body. With Roy Engel as President Grant.

"It was my first stunt on this show," said future stunt coordinator Whitey Hughes. "I dreamed up this gag and I didn't know Bobby at that time, so I said, 'Mr. Conrad, I'll be up on top and dive down at you.' Bobby said, 'You mean jump, don't you?' I said, 'No, I'll dive at you. When I call "Bob" put



John Dehner as Torres, the Steel Assassin, in first season's "The Night of the Steel Assassin," a show that set the tenor for outrageous stunt fails.

your hands up and I'll be there.' He looked at me and said, 'You're kidding.' I said no and we did it." Conrad was so impressed with Hughes he asked him to be the show's stunt coordinator. It laid the groundwork for thousands of outrageous stunt falls which would become part of the show's signature.

"Come back. Oh, come back. Oh, you, fraidy cat."

—Loveless (to his "just needled by West" cat)

THE NIGHT OF THE RAVEN

1966. Color. Produced by Michael Garrison. Directed by Irving Moore. Written by Ed Di Loreno.

West and Gordon are given three days to find War Eagle's daughter Wanakee (Phyllis Newman) or there will be an Indian uprising. Our heroes learn that the Voltaire-less Dr. Loveless kidnapped her as a ruse to capture them. After smoking one of Loveless' mickey finn cigars, West awakens to realize he and Wanakee are only six inches tall and for the first time he must look up to Loveless.

This episode obviously pays homage to THE INCREDIBLE SHRINKING MAN. Apparently, Garrison originally wanted Sonny and Cher to play the parts of Wanakee and her mate.

"Demis. What did I do to him? What did I do?"

—Senator Buckley holding his dead son

THE NIGHT OF THE SIMIAN TERROR

1968. Color. Produced by Bruce Lansbury. Directed by Michael Caffey. Written by Robert Dennis and Earl Barret.

West and Gordon arrive at Senator Buckley's (Dabbs Greer) home concerned about his absence from Washington. Grace Gaynor plays his beautiful daughter Naomi. Giant Richard Keil plays Demis in ape costume, a sentient simian offspring of Buckley.

Noted actor Richard Kiel, who had dialogue as the gorilla, "What I really learned from the show was not wanting to play characters that don't speak. The guy that created the gorilla suit was actually a

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Robert Conrad as a miniaturized James West, fighting off Dr. Loveless' vicious feline pet in second season's "The Night of the Raven."



WILD WILD WEST TV RETROSPECTIVE

The behind-the-scenes story of the imaginative '60s TV action series that inspired the feature film.

By Craig Reid

From 1965-1969, Secret Service Agents James T. West (Robert Conrad) and his clever partner Artemus Gordon (Ross Martin) rode into our lives on the smash TV hit THE WILD WILD WEST (WWW). Together, the dapper, brave Jim and the resourceful master of disguises Arte, would battle a menagerie of psychotically intelligent or blindly baneful villains that were planning to take over either America or the world.

The 1950s and early '60s was the heyday for TV Westerns, but they soon started to be outgunned by a new genre hero on the block: the spy show. It's only logical that WWW's creator and first producer Michael Garrison's interest in spy drama began when he and his partner at the time, Gregory Ratoff, purchased the rights to Ian Fleming's first James Bond story for 20th Century-Fox, CASINO ROYALE. When Ratoff passed away, the project also died but Garrison's interest in the spy genre lived.

As the Bond craze grew so did Garrison's interest in developing a similar project. He mentioned to his friend Hunt Stromberg, Jr. (head of CBS programming) an idea: Bond on a horse. This developed into the concept of a post Civil War President Grant having to deal with international spies and his weapon in the struggle was his own secret agent, Captain James T. West. CBS' president Jim Aubrey gave them the green light.



Robert Conrad in "The Night of the Watery Death," preparing to throw a knife at a force field "off" switch, James Bond action wedged to Jules Verne sci-fi.

Originally entitled THE WILD WEST, when the pilot, "The Night of the Inferno," was written by Gil Ralston, West initially didn't have a partner, rather he'd meet a travelling peddler who would deliver messages and make devices for West. Artemus' name was derived from a book about early Greece that Ralston owned entitled *Artemicio*. His use of devices grew from Ralston's experience in the armed forces booby-trap school.

At the time, Robert Conrad was working on a film called YOUNG DILLINGER with a young Nick Adams (MONSTER ZERO). "We had no budget on that film so I was doing all my own stunts," Conrad recalled. "I was asked to cast for the WWW, everyone in town had heard of this but I thought, 'Oh, it's during my lunch break [of DILLINGER], got nothing

else to do.' It had a \$750,000 budget, which was extraordinary for TV back then. So I went, got tested and got the part right then, and not later."

Conrad's test was being viewed on close-circuit TV by Aubrey and Stromberg. "I thought my scene was average but it was my demeanor off camera that they liked. I was complaining because they had me wearing elevator shoes and they were very uncomfortable. They were actually Alan Ladd's and his feet were smaller than mine. I was making sarcastic remarks about the casting process and I was on camera all the time. So when I went down to the dressing room, they said, 'Suit up, you're the man.'"

And suit up he did. With his high tailored vest-like jacket, tight pants and raised boot heels, West's get-up looked like something a bullfighter might

wear. Said Conrad, "You know, I've always thought that I might have made a decent matador. In fact, during some of my time in Spain I actually studied some flamenco dancing. I also studied martial arts and used those in my fights with the dance and martial art stances and postures. I would just put all these things together."

Ross Martin was sought for the role of West's partner, Artemus Gordon, but was turned down the role four times until certain changes were made to the character. CBS was so enthralled with his ability to do different dialects and characters, they knew he was the man for the role. Martin actually spoke seven languages and could do 52 dialects (except his Scots accent needed some

Man of action Conrad with Ross Martin as partner Artemus Gordon, scientist and master of disguises.



ROBERT CONRAD

"I thought my scene was average but it was my demeanor off camera that they liked... When I went down to the dressing room, they said, 'Suit up, you're the man.'"



Conrad and John Van Dreelan as Marquis Philippe, examining Philippe's fiery dragon torpedo invention in second season's "The Night of the Watery Death."

work). Artemus was originally intended to be more of a supplier of information and gadgets, changes were made to make Gordon West's partner, a man who comes across like Burt Lancaster's RAINMAKER and Robert Preston's MUSIC MAN wrapped around a blanket of Lon Chaney's MAN OF A THOUSAND FACES.

Martin once said of Arte, "He hates to fight not because he's a coward but because he's a complete con man. If he can't talk a man out of it, then he's failed. His two major weaknesses are booze and women."

Noted series writer Ken Kolb, "Ross was in love with himself, an actor's actor. Ross could not figure out why he was the second banana because he was obviously the better actor and just as handsome as Bobby."

Throughout the tenure of the show Gordon donned himself in 124 different disguises that would arise from not only his own ability to do makeup but from the makeup man Don Schoenfeld, later to be replaced by Ken Chase. They had a set of five different noses to work from, as well as a plaster cast of Ross's head which you can see proudly displayed in the "The Night of the Brain."

It proved difficult, however, to integrate Martin into the show's action format. Noted producer Fred Freiberger, "Bobby was playing Gary Cooper and he knew his limitations, and he knew Ross was a better actor than he was, so when I asked Bobby how could

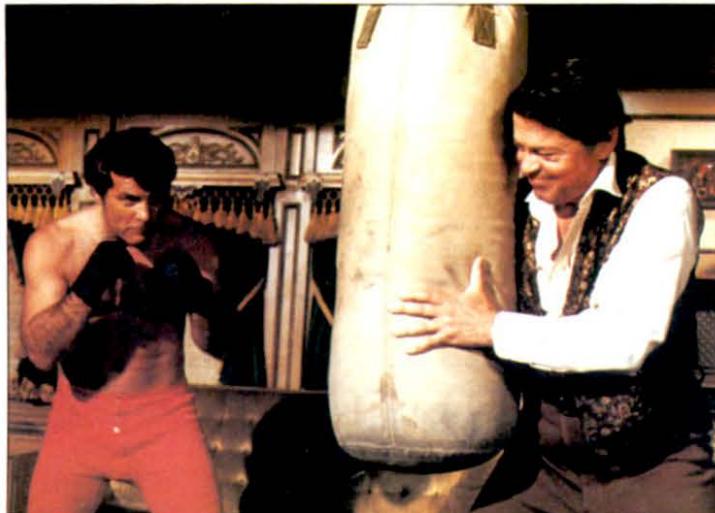
we get Ross involved in the fight he said, 'Just keep him out of my area. I don't want to get into his area.' But Bobby was always cooperative and said they would find a way to put him in and they did."

One problem was that Martin was no match for Conrad's physical prowess. Recalled stunt coordinator Whitey Hughes, "Ross had a difficult time getting on horses and would have to hang on for dear life at full gallop. He kept screaming 'Whoa, whoa,' to the horse."

So what was Conrad and Martin's off camera relationship like? Admitted Conrad, "There was some friction but we were both mature men. I had respect for his talent. I'd say, 'Ross, you have the greatest co-stars in the world, Academy Award winners, you do the acting and I'll do the stunts.'

"We were on the JOHNNY CARSON SHOW together and Johnny kept talking to me about the fighting and stunts. When

Conrad and sparring partner Ross Martin. The leads split up the series chores whereby Conrad got all the action and girls, and Martin did the acting.



Johnny got to Ross he asked, 'So Ross, do you do your own stunts?' He just looked at him and answered, 'I do my own acting.' The next day on set I just said to Ross, 'You can't top that.'"

Just as the pilot was supposed to be shot, the director was fired, so Richard Sarafian, who had worked on such classic shows as BRONCO, MAVERICK, 77 SUNSET STRIP and LAWMAN, came to the rescue literally at the last minute. Sarafian musingly recalled, "It was December in 1964 and I came in at the eleventh hour. I was agreeing to do the thing but a deal hadn't been made yet so my manager told me not to show up. But they had a plane waiting for me and I was threatened that either I direct the show or I would never work in Hollywood again. I showed up, went to Sonora, shot some of the pilot there because they had a railroad station for the opening. I basically directed the show with no prep."

Sarafian had worked with Conrad on HAWAIIAN EYE and recalled the producer Garrison received a demotion after the pilot. "For whatever reason he was banished to a room somewhere on the lot where he'd watch dailies but couldn't make any contributions to the

show," said Sarafian. "Fred Freiberger and Richard Landau came in. I'd worked with them on BEN CASEY. I was *persona non grata* with Conrad. I was pretty hard on him. In those days he was not as professional as he ultimately was later on. He was a cocky guy. I even slept on the soundstage so I could run lines with him so he could be prepared the next morning.

"Ross was the ultimate pro and between the two of them at the time, they were vying for position and ultimately they found a balance and with that, the show matured and Conrad became more dependable and comfortable as an actor. After the pilot, I was called back for a second episode by Freiberger, the 'Thousands Eyes.'"

Although the show went through eight producers during the first season, besides series creator Garrison, only four had any real impact on the show, Collier Young (episodes 2-4), Fred Freiberger (5-14), John Mantley (15-21) and Gene L. Coon (22-27). Fred Freiberger brought in two of the show's most important writers, Henry Sharp, who eventually became the story editor and John Kneubuhl, the man who created Dr. Miguelito Loveless.

Noted Freiberger, "The show wasn't working for them and they wanted a different approach and gave me a script to look at. When I gave it to Richard Landau, my story editor for years, he tossed it into the garbage. I told them I'd rather avoid period and geography and focus on the bizarre, which is what they wanted. I hired writer George Schenck and partner William Marks. We created a story about a killer train ('The Night of the Deadly Bed') and re-introduced the Bondian feel. At the time we came in, morale on set was low and people were scared because



WILL SMITH

On playing West in the mold of Robert Conrad.

By Frederick Szebin

"I didn't watch the show when I was growing up," said the new leading man of the latest baby boomer TV series to hit the big screen, "but I'm a bit younger than [director] Barry [Sonnenfeld]. He was able to watch it while it was actually on. But I've seen every episode since I took the role, and it's amazing, a bit like *STAR TREK*. You can look at *STAR TREK* and see the genesis of all of those special effects movies. *THE WILD WILD WEST* is like that for action movies."



Smith, too sexy for his clothes, takes direction from Barry Sonnenfeld (r), a fan of the TV show while growing up.

Every action concept was done on *THE WILD WILD WEST*.

"The one thing that I loved and wanted to maintain about the James West character was that calm lady's man thing. James West never pushed too hard. He was always really calm and straight forward: Ma'am. Very simple. Very direct. But the element that I wanted to add and bring my flavor to was the reaction to danger. James West, Robert Conrad, was the coolest man on television—ever. I wanted to

bring just a little bit of a touch of uncertainty to the character, that hero that you're not really sure whether or not he's going to win; he's going to do everything in his power to try to win, but you're not completely sure how it's going to come out."

"This James West is a little more impulsive," Smith continued. "He attacks situations slightly out of good sense, and Artemus is a thinker, so he thinks about things that one second too long, whereas West acts that one second too soon, so between the two of them we make one perfect fella!"

[laughed] West is more of an old-fashioned cowboy type. Artemus has all his newfangled gadgetry, and the thing that is really a pain to West is that Gordon is always going into West's things and putting different gadgets in his vests and boots, and I find out about them at really inopportune times. It would be nice if he would tell me he was going to put something in there, but it makes for really, really good comedy and a great relationship."

To prepare for the part, Smith had to learn to ride a horse and twirl a gun, as well as adhere to certain character expectations. "The first thing that was a part of my deal," said Smith, "was that I had to wear the waistcoat. That is the James West signature outfit. My body's a little bigger than Robert Conrad's, you know, so the waistcoat really accentuates my buttocks, which is really important to me when I take these films. I have buttocks clauses in all of my contracts, just the way it's filmed and the way it's situated in the shot. I have a couple



Smith as the movie's James West, adding shades and hipness to the persona created by Conrad, "the coolest man on television—ever," according to Smith.

of different outfits that I put together. There are some 1869 sunglasses that I added, and just a little more tilt on the hat. Gotta put the gangsta tilt on the hat, you know. As soon as I put all this stuff on, I felt James West. That's what's great about being an actor; as soon as you get the wardrobe on, you start to feel the role, my spurs and all of that. I just be feeling damn sexy!

"This is definitely the most action sequences I've ever done," said Smith. "The blue-screen elements are the most difficult elements of the film. You're acting against nothing, performing with nothing, but Barry keeps it fun. You don't know what you're gonna have and that's really the difficult element, but it really comes together. As far as the wardrobe and special effects, this'll be the most elaborate film that I've ever been involved with. I took the three-month crash course every day on the horse, and you

feel strong when you're up on a horse.

"For the most part, I play West in the straightforward-hard-core cowboy style. There used to be action movies with Sylvester Stallone, Arnold Schwarzenegger, Eddie Murphy. Those days of just one guy being that huge...those days are over. Now you have to have an incredible cast and a great, director to handle them. Barry pulls characters and comedy out of me that I'd never be able to find myself. He looks at the world differently and, really, I feel completely comfortable when I work with Barry, to just do what he said, even if it may slightly be against my instincts. He understands how to take something that may be a little awkward and a little different and spin it in a way that is special, but it's also fun and exciting. We call it the BS Factor. I'm always on BS alert. We work well together that way." □



THE MOVIE

TV show knock-off is but a witless, witless waste.

By Thomas Doherty

Aging baby boomers looking for a slick update of the well-remembered television show or video junkies who know it only from rare syndication replays on TNT must see the new movie version as only a train wreck. Spewing smokey FX and screeching low-IQ dialogue, this runaway production commands less horsepower and plods more leadenly than any single episode of the original series, whose per hour cost wouldn't have paid the catering bill for the Will Smith music video. Tedious and irritating, the film chugs along noisily, generating real interest only when it runs off the rails into outer bizarreness.

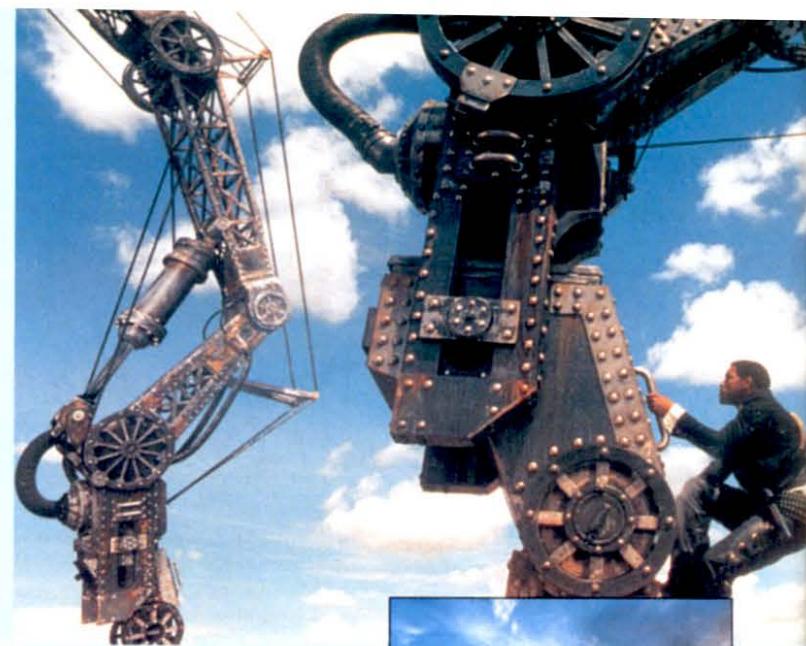
Unlike STAR TREK or THE BRADY BUNCH, THE WILD WILD WEST is not a television "evergreen," a syndication-friendly program rewound endlessly in cable space, but a ghost rider from a time when the western genre ruled the range of three-network hegemony. The gimmick that set it apart from the herd was its blend of MAVERICK and THE MAN FROM U.N.C.L.E.: frontier irony mixed with gadget-mad espionage. Plus it had the virtue of never taking itself too seriously.

As secret service agent James T. West, macho leading man Robert Conrad (somehow managing to look comfortable in really tight pants) teamed with character actor Ross Martin as master-of-disguise Artemis Gordon. Together, they wandered the frontiers of post-Civil War America in a plush Pullman car romancing saloon girls, shooting down varmints, and foiling the schemes of mad scientists, who never let the limits of 19th century

industrial age technology stand in the way of modern science. In the update, Will Smith plays West, Kevin Kline plays Gordon, Kenneth Branagh plays the villainous Dr. Arliss Loveless, and Salma Hayek exposes her dimples fore and aft.

Of course, the casting of Will Smith as a secret service agent circa 1869 is certainly audacious but inevitably problematic. Given the spectre of American racism, even a film as proudly dimwitted as W3 can't sidestep the incongruity of a black man playing a role forbidden him by historical reality. Maybe director Barry Sonnenfeld should have just pretended everyone was color blind. Smith is called on not once but twice to do a bit of Sambo soft shoe. The sequence to really wince at showcases that perennial wellspring of comedic material, the Deep South lynching of a black man who has touched a white woman. Smith does a mock standup routine before the mob (talk about a tough crowd!) before Artie rescues him from the noose.

Another problem with the black/white dynamic duo is the stereotypical separation of pow-



West vs. The Tarantula: even a film as proudly dimwitted as W3 can't sidestep the incongruity of casting Will Smith despite historical realities.

ers: Jim is the hot-headed moron who shoots first, Artie the calm brains. Unlike the co-dependent and respectful partnership between Conrad and Martin in the TV series, Smith and Kline are bickering newlyweds, not longtime partners with complementary skills. White man thinks and tinkers; black man shoots and shouts.

The tone of the movie is wildly uneven, careening back and forth from madcap adventure, vaudevillian farce, and blunt gunplay. The jokes over fake breasts and amputated limbs are almost discreet by contemporary comedic standards, and they are also hugely unfunny.

Brandishing a fake southern accent and a squad of bimbos in push-up bras, the presumably financially strapped Kenneth Branagh essays the role originated by Michael Dunn, a bril-



liant 3'6" actor whose size and physique doomed him to play character parts. Nominated for a Best Supporting Actor award for his role in SHIP OF FOOLS (1963), Dunn was one of the most amazing sights on television in the late 1960s. The evil scientist Miguelito Loveless could have been grotesque, but Dunn lent him force, feeling, and humor. Dunn died too young, at age 39, in 1973. The motion picture version evokes Dunn by sawing off Branagh at the waist, placing him in a supercharged wheel chair, and digitally erasing his nether regions. When Loveless aims racial slurs at Smith, Smith responds by making fun of his disability.

The talent assembled in the service of THE WILD WILD WEST—Barry Sonnenfeld, director of GET SHORTY and MEN IN BLACK, the congenial, charismatic Will Smith, the always reliable and likeable Kevin Kline, the often brilliant Kenneth Branagh, and the luscious Salma Hayek, plus the usual sheets of technical credits—has produced a film whose only justification in the overheated blockbuster summer of 1999 is an excuse for two hours of decent air conditioning. Otherwise, for them, and us, it is a witless, witless waste. □

White man thinks and tinkers; black man shoots and shouts; the series' co-dependent, respectful partners rendered as inappropriate racial stereotypes.



they knew the show was in trouble. We worked day and night and got things done on time.

"Richard [Landau] and I also created a writer's checklist we called the 10 Commandments. It was just reminding writers that each script needed certain attributes, things like creating a strong adversary for Jim, gorgeous girls and at the end of the second act, a writer shouldn't know how to get West and Gordon out of the trouble they had ended up in. That would give the designer headaches like when we had Bobby in that little cage ('The Night the Wizard Shook the Earth'). He said, 'How do we do that?' I said, 'We do the impossible.' He went away shaking his head. So later we had this stage coach where the top flies off and someone flies out. Someone asked the designer, 'How are we going to do that?' He replied, 'We do the impossible.'"

The ultimate villain of THE WILD WILD WEST was none other than the childlike, psychotic, dwarf-sized madman Dr. Miguelito Loveless. Beautifully portrayed by Michael Dunn, Loveless had a giant-sized anger against the world for mistreating him, against God for creating him, and especially Jim West, for being Jim West.

When writer John Kneubuhl was flicking through an issue of *Time* magazine, he saw a picture of Dunn, a singer, and had a brainstorm to make Dunn West's next opponent. He told producer Fred Freiberger and hopped on a plane to New York and tracked Dunn down to a nightclub where he was performing with his singing partner Phoebe Dorin. Dorin signed on as Antoinette, Loveless' singing sidekick. Each time they appeared on a show they'd perform a duet.

Noted Freiberger, "As usual, I had big problems from the network about having a dwarf being the lead villain but I was truly fascinated with the idea of a dwarf owning half of California and then demanding it back. Even though our first episode with him ['The Night the Wizard Shook the Earth'] did really well, the network didn't want me to hire him again. But William Pailey [founder of

WILD WILD WEST

RICHARD DONNER

The superstar director looks back on his TV days and how the West was fun.

By Craig Reid

Features director Richard Donner went on to direct three episodes of the WILD WILD WEST after being brought in to "fix" the pilot. "Back then I was known as the pilot doctor. Around that time I had redone about five pilots, like GILLIGAN'S ISLAND. I got along with everyone and enjoyed working on the show and I thought it was a clever show. I remember there was a big battle scene to do. They gave me a good two weeks to do it."

Donner remembered working with producer Gene Coon on "The Night of the Bars From Hell" where we see the first electric chair and West being its first victim. "Coon was a wonderful man, good producer and writer, very creative and inventive and really gave me free rein on my work."

The pilot's credited director Richard Sarafian apparently didn't get along with Conrad, so what was Donner's view? "We had met before socially and had a good time but I'd get upset at him because he wanted to do all of his own stunts himself. In that prison show ['Bars From Hell'], he ran down a corridor and flew through this wall smashing it to pieces and landed on a card table with a bunch of guys playing cards and he landed too far. He got carried out."

One of the other shows Donner did was "TNOT Murderous Spring" fourth in the Dr. Loveless saga. It was the first without Loveless' giant sidekick Voltaire, but his new sidekick was instead a very large lady named Kitty Twitty (Jenie Jackson) and a mute attendant played by Conrad's father Leonard Falk. Donner remi-



Donner, West alum turned movie auteur.

nised, "Michael Dunn, ah, he was a delightful, stimulating and charming guy. I'm six foot one but in a sense he was much taller than I, and back then he knew nothing of his size. I remember that Bob and his boys were very protective of him and made sure he didn't exceed his bounds. He was a tough kid but he was also pretty fragile.

"We did the end scene first where Dunn had to come running out of a chicken coop. He tripped over the coop and hurt his leg so we had to rewrite all the other scenes with him in a wheelchair. So in the beginning the big, fat lady, a wonderful woman, he would hide between her legs and we had him hidden in her carrying bag also. Did that show at Radford, just off of Ventura Boulevard. It was a tiny lot, had a little Western street, and that's where we did GILLIGAN'S ISLAND. That was also with Gene Coon."

The last show Donner directed was "TNOT Returning Dead" which starred Sammy Davis, Jr.,

and Peter Lawford. "After the show, Peter and Sammy and I became good friends," he said. "They asked me to come up with a movie for the two of them to do together. I came up with SALT AND PEPPER. We got Michael Pertwee (DR. WHO) to write it and we shot it in England. After that we started, with Paul Newman, Pierre Salinger and a few others, our own discotheque in L.A. called 'The Factory.' It was world renowned and the most exclusive one in L.A. But with the picture, I had a terrible falling out with Lawford and Sammy—that was years ago. They fired me from the final cut. There were a lot of drugs and alcohol in those days and I didn't get along.

Being involved with THE WILD WILD WEST really helped my career, becoming a filmmaker."

Donner noted that he had a lot of fun working with WWW creator and producer Michael Garrison. "Garrison was a wonderful, flamboyant and crazy producer," said Donner. "He was gay but it wasn't too tough for him to handle it back then. I remember once we went to a big dinner party at his house and my date was very upset because he was dressed in a prettier dress than she. I'll never forget that. He was very outgoing about it and just delightful."

"I was very saddened when I heard that he died. My girlfriend and I were at his home and we noticed that under a rug on a flight of stairs he had these incredible Spanish tiles. He removed the rug. So when he fell down those stairs, if the rug had still been there, he might not have broken his neck. He made working on the show delightful."



ACTION STUNTS

How Robert Conrad was the Evel Knievel of TV.

By Craig Reid

Action and stunts made THE WILD WILD WEST a pure, visual, pugilistic spectacle, the likes that have never been seen before on American TV. The man in charge of the stunts and labeled as a "flyer," was an unassuming country boy from Oklahoma who came to LA at the age of 16, seeking to become a stuntman and ride on the open plains with his heroes. Throughout his 50 year career as a stuntman and stunt coordinator, Whitey Hughes has been touted as the top stuntman in Hollywood.

Hughes was originally called in to work on a stunt by first season coordinator Bill Catching. "Bill called me one day to see if I could replace another boy who was supposed to work on the show saying, 'I got a job for you.' I went over and

dreamed up a gag with one of the few boys who doubled Bobby back then, Chuck O'Brian. Had three or four guys in the gag [see "The Night of the Steel Assassin" in episode guide]. So I told Bobby that at the right time I'd yell 'Bob' and you just put your hand up and I'll be there. We did it, he put his hands up in time, turned his body and knocked the guy back down. After that I was talking with the makeup man and Bobby came over and the guy said to him, 'Do you know Whitey Hughes?' Bobby said, 'I've worked with him all day but never been introduced.' We shook hands and he said, 'You'll be back.'

"Sure enough, he called me back and one night we went out to dinner, me, his girlfriend and my wife Dottie, and he said to me, 'Whitey, how would you like to coordinate the action on WWW?' I sat up and said that would be a dream come true but it could never happen and...he cut me off saying, 'I asked you, how would you like to coordinate the action?' I said, 'I'd love it, but there are guys ahead of me and CBS might not give me the job.' Well, apparently Bill was on his way out and going to work with Chuck Connors on BRANDED, so I got the job and formed this group."

That was Red West, bodyguard for Elvis Presley. He just came onto the set one day, went up to Conrad and asked for work. Conrad directed him to Hughes and he became part of the crew. Dick Cangey was second in the group, a former fighter and became known as the "catcher" (the one that breaks the fall for others). Jerry



Conrad catches Whitey Hughes (l) in "Night of the Steel Assassin," a daring leap that earned Hughes promotion to stunt supervisor.

Laveroni came in later and Tom Huff, who was working with the carpenter gang. There was Bob Herron who doubled for Ross, who had worked with Conrad on HAWAIIAN EYE. Others would come and go but one of the other originals was Jimmy George, the wardrobe man who was the perfect body double for Conrad. Considered one of the nice guys of the group, he would double for Conrad as needed. On that subject Hughes noted, "Bobby told me he hated having doubles, but if it was something extremely dangerous, a crash or burn, we'd get a guy from outside to do it. He could've done it but I told Bobby that I didn't want CBS to give me marching orders before I started."

If you've watched the show, you see him just about every week, usually as the smallest stuntman that is always getting tossed around like a rag doll. But with the wonders of makeup, you can still tell that it's Whitey as the butler in "TNOT Burning Diamond," the red-headed screamer in "TNOT Vicious Valentine," the blind armyman in "TNOT Underground Terror," the head granny on a wheel chair, the Russian soldier, or the countless henchmen characters for every villain West of the Mississippi.

Hughes remembers the accident that sidelined Conrad for weeks. "We set up this gag

where he was supposed to jump off a balcony and land on this chandelier and he was supposed to swing into Jerry Laveroni. Jerry was new, we took him on as one of Bob's boys. Jerry was supposed to be there to stop Bobby's momentum from the swing by Bobby kicking him in the chest. The gag didn't work because the chandelier was hanging straight down when he jumped. If it had been angled towards him so he swung down at an angle, it would never have happened."

Hughes noted that if the bar on the chandelier had been taped, Conrad could have probably held on. It wasn't because Hughes was absent from the set moonlighting on a bread commercial. "He insisted saying, 'Whitey, take the commercial. We can cover for you here and it will be okay.' He was in the hospital for two weeks and I went to see him at nights. I was chewing my nails. Thought I'd be through. I was the coordinator, I should have been there."

Restrictions were imposed after that, but Conrad found a way around them. "One day he fooled me. We had this gag where Red West [from "TNOT Tycoons"] and Dick Cangey were chasing Bobby up a staircase, enter this room and then Jimmy George was supposed to come out as Bobby. He got his arm all tangled up and then they came crashing down out of the

Hughes with Ross Martin as Artemus, in makeup as the butler to Midas in "The Night of the Burning Diamond."



veranda. I had dug a pit and put a catcher in there for all three guys but he fooled me. Bobby had told Jimmy, 'I am going to do this.' Christ, I almost had a heart attack when I saw the three flying down. Bobby got up and laughed and said, 'How'd you like that?' I said, 'Now Bob, you're gonna get me fired.' But he could do stunts like that. Bobby was a handyman."

But getting hurt and taking the risk is part of a stuntman's livelihood. Hughes recalled how Conrad took it with the best of them. "Had a boy on the show, he's a brand name now. I think Bobby hired him. He had a fight scene on a podium. This kid was supposed to pick up this big Captain Chair. It wasn't a breakaway, so I asked him to raise it up but not hit Bobby with it and Bobby will give you a gut shot. Well, the fight started and he picked up this chair and whacked Bobby over the head. When I see this guy hitting him I'm going, 'Oooohhh.' I caught Bobby coming off the end of the podium. I had to hold him up and you can see him stagger around a bit, I don't know how he shook the cobwebs out, but he did and we finished the fight. That was his last appearance on the show."

If irony doesn't take the cake on this one, nothing does. That stuntman turned out to be Terry Leonard, the man stunt coordinating the new movie version.

Hughes was sad when the show was cancelled. "I didn't get into pictures for the money, it was for the love," he said. "As long as I could make a living, I was working and loving every minute of it. Even with all my injuries, I'd do it all again. It's been that good to me." □

Conrad, about to make his near fatal chandelier jump in "The Night of the Fugitives," hospitalized for weeks.



SERIES WRITER KEN KOLB

"Ross was in love with himself, an actor's actor. Ross could not figure out why he was the second banana because he was obviously the better actor and just as handsome as Bobby."



Conrad as West, under the spell of Christopher Cary as Tycho in fourth season's "The Night of the Winged Terror," the show's only two-part episode.

time and saw the show and told me to get out there and sign those people to a contract. Although Dunn appeared in only 10 shows, it was initially planned that he would do four per season, but as time went by changes in his personal life and health made that difficult. Nevertheless, he is still the show's most famous villain."

Born as Gary Neil Miller in 1934 in Oklahoma, Dunn was a child prodigy with an IQ of 178, who became a concert pianist at age 15. Afflicted with chondrodystrophy, a congenital, progressively crippling disease, his 3' 10" frame would constantly feel the effects of the disease, ending his piano career and later his life but not before making Loveless a household name with his contradictory childlike demeanor and diabolically evil ways. Dunn once said, "Secretly all he really wants is chocolate creams and women and a chance to sing. The Loveless' character was inspired by Philip Barry's *Here Come the Clowns* where a tormented dwarf blurts, 'If there is a God, why did he make people like me?' A satanic apparition glares down laughing, 'Would you deny Him a sense of humor?'

Dorin, Dunn's singing partner once noted, "No matter how his life was apt to change, he was not going to get tall or handsome. Most of his problems would still be present, no matter how successful he was. That was a killer, and it destroyed Michael."

CBS wanted Freiberger to drop the show's comically animated opening credits and act-ending commercial breaks, which dared to take a different approach. DePatie-Freleng (PINK PANTHER) cartoons were hired to create cartoon boxes that reflected certain aspects of the West character. "The network wanted me to change all of that. I said no, fought for it and I won that fight."

Noted Freiberger, "I had heard that Bobby was hard to handle, but to me, I had never come across a star that was so cooperative, wonderful and as hard working as Bobby Conrad. I established a great working relationship not only with Bobby but also with Ross...[a respectful moment of silence later] he was a wonderful actor."

"I didn't do straight Westerns or gun fights. I'd bring in different things like a kid-

napped Albanian Princess ('The Night of the Dancing Death') or a deranged Harvard professor ('The Night of the Human Trigger') and, of course, John Kneubuhl's Dr. Loveless. I had written Westerns before but wanted to stay away from the conventional stuff, which is what they were objecting to. And in the days when it wasn't politically correct to be liberal, we were liberal in science fiction and Westerns and people didn't object to that. We could do anti-racism in a Western and it was easy not having anyone call you a Communist. I think that made the network afraid."

And perhaps it was that fear that came to fruition. CBS announced that Freiberger left WWW to move on to a better project. "You know what my answer to that was, don't you? I was fired because I succeeded in what they wanted me to do." Freiberger left to produce STAR TREK's third season.

The second season was shot in color and also focused on attracting marquee names to be the villains. Names like Boris Karloff, Ricardo Montalban, Carroll O'Connor, Sammy Davis, Jr., Ida Lupino, Agnes Moorehead, and returning favorites such as Michael Dunn's Dr. Loveless and Victor Buono as a new and improved villain Count Manzepi, solidifying the Hollywood glitz appeal while maintaining a bizarre label.

Bruce Lansbury was the show's final producer and did a wide variety of storylines over the last 68 episodes. At the time of the pilot, he was head of CBS programming in New York and was responsible for rewriting the screen test for the casting of West's character. "It was a show that confused William Pailey [head of CBS]," said Lansbury. "Although grounded in the myth and lore of the West, it was a bizarre series. I like to do fantasy although we had straight action and Westerns. I tried some Jules Verne-type sci-fi and the show had a sort of tiffany look to it. So that was my approach. The show was screwed up so badly after the first season with all the different producers and I was brought in to make it a happy group of people. It was tough coming in after eight or nine producers be-

cause Leonard Katzman was a strong right-hand man and the crew wanted him to be producer and their noses were out of joint when I came back from New York. I had to just overcome that. Bob and I crossed swords in the beginning but we worked things out and became good friends.

The show also featured imaginative stunts and of course Conrad's specialty, the fight sequences. Bob Conrad lived and breathed action and didn't care for dialogue.

"In the beginning, there wasn't a great deal of friendship between [Conrad and Martin], but they started to soften and they became good friends. They were very self-protective for the first year but after they knew their territories and stayed within that purview and certain lines were drawn you could see their friendship."

Henry Sharp wrote some of the best episodes of THE WILD WILD WEST and was the only writer to survive all four seasons and work with all the major producers. When Bruce Lansbury took over the reigns, he made Sharp story editor.

Noted Sharp of working on the show, "Ross [Martin] was eager to try something new and would measure up to whatever was written for his new characterization. Bob [Conrad] didn't want to do that, Bob felt that this show was as he put it, 'his

Conrad with Michael Dunn as Dr. Loveless in "Night of the Murderous Spring," directed by Richard Donner.



STUNT COORDINATOR WHITEY HUGHES

"Ross had a difficult time getting on horses and would have to hang on for dear life at full gallop. He kept screaming, 'Whoa, whoa,' to the horse."



Polar opposites: Martin and Conrad as Gordon and West. Conrad made the show the finest action series on TV; Martin could barely stay on his horse.

[Martin's] accent box' and he wanted to do it just the way he had always done it, with fighting and kicking.

"When CBS called us in, there was a big to do about an exaggerated degree of violence in all the shows. Bob didn't like giving up his fight scenes. I tried to devise methods where he could defeat odds against him not with his fists but with clever ways of undermining the opposition. I wrote action scenes put Bob would want to extend them. It was his show and you didn't argue with him because he was happy with his stunt team and they would always work on bits to stick into the show."

Sharp noted that Martin "had immaculate acting credentials that Bob with all his abilities didn't have. But that was okay because Bob did what he did best and Ross was capable of chameleon changes."

Sharp felt the series suffered because it was directed badly, "I watched each show with a great deal of pain," he said. "They weren't the best directors [33 different ones] and it seemed most were obsessed with getting things done under budget and fast, so it suffered."

The fourth season was a try-

ing time for Martin. During the filming of "The Night of the Avaricious Actuary," which aired June 26, 1968, Martin tripped on a rifle and broke his leg. Noted Lansbury, "It was actually a hairline fracture on his shin but it still required he wore a cast up to his hip. When he came back we rewrote the scripts so he could sit down or limp with walking stick."

During the filming of fourth season's "The Night of Fire and Brimstone," Martin fell ill on the set. The following day, August 17th, 1968, Martin suffered a heart attack. "We were all pretty devastated and saddened," said Lansbury. "Not knowing when he was coming back. So we started casting for guest replacement agents. We didn't change the scripts, just inserted different actors in where Arte would have been." Martin missed nine episodes but made a full recovery and by "The Night of the Pistoleros" appeared trim, in good spirits, new look and with a new hairstyle.

When the series ended, Conrad and Martin went their separate ways and on July 3rd, 1981, Martin had a second heart attack and died at the age of 61.

Conrad and Martin returned

to their roles for two TV movies in 1979, THE WILD WILD WEST, REVISITED and MORE WILD WILD WEST, directed by Burt Kennedy. "We all got along fine with each other when we did these," said Conrad, "but I wasn't happy with them only because CBS imposed a lot of restrictions on us. They never came up to the level of what we had done before."

Conrad's work on the show easily qualifies as the Jackie Chan of TV and even Chan acknowledges that Conrad is a fight and stunt icon. When Conrad and Chan once bumped into each other at an awards function they comically exchanged "You de man" phrases. Lansbury also sees that kinship. "When you watch Chan and Bobby, you can see that they are just going for it and you can tell that it's them doing their own fights and stuff."

Sadly, such superb fight action is sorely lacking in the feature film remake. When Sonnenfeld hired one of the new generation of rising Hong Kong action directors, Andy Cheng, to shoot an ending fight for them. Apart from being one of Chan's right hand men for his past four films, Cheng is also one of the fight choreographers for MARTIAL LAW.

"It's true that the show had a lot of fights and action," Lansbury admits, "But to me it was more like a cartoon and I didn't see things as having gratuitous violence. I firmly believe we were the sacrificial lamb for Senator Dodd's committee on 'Sex and Violence on TV.' Plus, there were repercussions after Bobby's accident."

Conrad closes with these comments, "These new restriction handed down by the network were a result of this Violence on TV committee. I couldn't wear a gun and for the fights you'd only hear music and not the punch strikes. But you know, when the show was cancelled, I actually had a sigh of relief because someone was going to get carted out of there. I had already been carted out and so was Whitey my stunt coordinator. If it had happened beyond that and more serious, it would never have been the same."



Richard Kiel in ape costume as Demis, the simian offspring of a Washington senator in third season's "The Night of the Simian Terror."

famous actor from all those swashbuckling swordsman and pirate films."

"As Plutarch once said, 'To create harmony one must investigate discord.'"

—Gordon disguised as Mr. Ortuglo

THE NIGHT OF THE DOOMSDAY FORMULA

1968. Color. Produced by Bruce Lansbury. Directed by Irving J. Moore. Written by Samuel Newman.

West arrives at Dr. Crane's home to be told by his daughter Lorna (Melinda Plowman) he's already meeting a man named West. West and Gordon search Crane's home and find his Doomsday Formula. A mushroom cloud explosive test later, they realize the implications of the formula being in the wrong hands, namely General Kroll (Kevin McCarthy). Gordon creates a firework diversion, and with a "slide for life" stunt gag, West rescues Lorna and escapes Kroll's gatling gun target practice room.

Martin's disguise as Mr. Ortuglo, a foul, singing Arab, is one of his best. Noted stunt coordinator Whitey Hughes, "I was the stunt double for the lady standing on the pedestal. That was Jimmy George standing in for Bobby. You'll see me turn my head away from the camera so you can't tell it's me."

"By the way, where is Mr. West?"

—Baron Hinterstoisser
"He said something about showing the big dipper to the daughter of the Lithuanian Ambassador."

—Gordon

THE NIGHT OF THE BIG BLACKMAIL

1969. Color. Produced by Bruce Lansbury. Directed by Irving J. Moore. Written by David Mossinger.

While President Grant attends a fencing

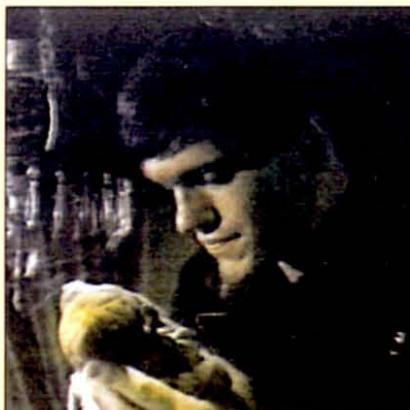
Stuntman Jimmy George doubles for Conrad as West rescues the heroine (stuntman Whitey Hughes) in "Night of the Doomsday Formula."



VOLTAIRE

Richard Keil on Conrad.

For three episodes, the 7ft. 2in. Richard Kiel played Voltaire, the infantile, body-crushing, pituitary giant assistant to Dr. Miguelito Loveless. Recalled Kiel, "It was just supposed to be a one-shot deal but they called me back to do a second one. I didn't speak in either one of those and so I had made my mind up not to do that again unless they included some dialogue. I was chagrined when I was told at casting that they had no intention of in-



Kell as a senator's son who turns into a gorilla in 1968's "Night of the Simian Terror," also played Loveless' giant sidekick Voltaire.

cluding dialogue. I said that I couldn't do it anymore. I was doing some other show at the same studio and ran into Robert Conrad and he said, 'I guess I'll see you in a couple of weeks.' I mentioned that, because I asked them to include some dialogue and they said, 'Nothing doing,' I wouldn't be on the show. Conrad asked me how long I would be on the lot and what sound stage I would be on. By lunch time my agent told me they were writing the script to include dialogue. I really respected that guy. He was an understanding, unique man."

Keil said he got along fine with Michael Dunn. "He was in a lot of pain. For a little man he actually had a giant ego. But it was great being on set and hearing him sing with his cabaret partner Phoebe Dorin."

Craig Reid



Robert Conrad as West, holding open the lever to the steam-pressured vault in the German Embassy in "The Night of the Big Blackmail."

competition at the German Embassy, Baron Hinterstoisser (Harvey Corman) informs Grant he should be present at a special reception later because he has something very "interestink" for him to see, as West and Gordon foil plans to politically embarrass the president.

Director Irving J. Moore would laugh uncontrollably every time Corman made an entrance because he constantly thought about Corman snickering during the live comedy skits on the CAROL BURNETT SHOW. The kinetoscope featured in the plot is really a short piece of film less than 50 feet, and wasn't invented by George Eastman until 1888.

"How is Arte bearing up under his Washington assignment, Sir?"

—West
"The question is, how is Washington bearing up?"
—President Grant

THE NIGHT OF THE WINGED TERROR

1969. Color. Produced by Bruce Lansbury. Directed by Marvin Chomsky. Written by Ken Pettus.

West and his new partner Frank Harper (William Schallert) see a professor wreck his art collection and a sheriff release criminals under a trance induced by orange-tinted glasses. It's all a plot by the large bulbous-headed Tycho (Christopher Cary) to disrupt U.S./Mexican relations. Michelle Carey plays Tycho's cantina accomplice Laurette.

This was the only two-parter story in the four-year history of the show. It was also the fifth and sixth episode without Ross Martin, who was recovering from his first heart attack. Actor William Schallert recalled his stint as West's partner, "I think they thought of me for the part because I had already appeared in two previous episodes and they knew I could handle different characters." □

William Schallert as agent Frank Harper, taking over for the ailing Ross Martin in the final season's "The Night of the Winged Terror."



THE MYSTERY MEN!

Trying to walk the fine line between comic book spoof and character drama.

By Joe Fordham

It all started with a Flaming Carrot. From out of the blue in 1987, Bob Burden's six feet tall, vegetable-headed, self-ignited, crime-fighting superhero with no superpowers rose to become a beacon of the eighties' direct-market sales, comic book store boom. It was a comic book revolution that had not been seen since the days of Zap and Fritz the Cat selling out of head shops 20 years before. Michael Richardson's Dark Horse Comics, established in this boom, saw the Carrot coming, gave him a home in his shelter for emerging artists and simultaneously acquired the motley coterie of Burden's Carrot universe, The Mysterymen. Dark Horse Comics spawned Dark Horse Entertainment, their film production company, in 1995, to usher in THE MASK and TIMECOP. TIMECOP forged a link with Lawrence Gordon and Lloyd Levin, the powerhouse producer double team, with ten years and 15 movie titles behind them. With combined credentials including DIE HARDS one and two, both PREDATORS, EVENT HORIZON, FIELD OF DREAMS, BOOGIE NIGHTS and THE ROCKETEER, Gordon and Levin's eclectic tastes lead them to establish a first-look development deal with Dark Horse. Richardson offered up Burden's Mysterymen.

Noted Levin, speaking from his Universal Studios office, "What really attracted us to the



The Bowler (Janeane Garofalo), the Shoveler (William H. Macy) and the Spleen (Paul Reubens), blue collar crimefighters hit the streets of Champion City.

Mystery Men were the characters, who were all very blue-collar, set in the margins of society, about the guy who has a shitty job whose boss beats the crap out of him, or the guy who's having problems with his wife and doesn't know how to relate to his kids, or the guy who has girlfriend problems. It was a real departure from any sort of situation Bruce Wayne would find himself in."

The Mystery Men's screen predecessors, however, still played a role in the producers' early story meetings. "Our superheroes are very self-aware of superhero mythology," noted Levin. "When you see BATMAN, SUPERMAN, or even SPAWN or BLADE, there's no awareness of the genre and its mythology. It was almost as if the characters in these movies

have grown up without seeing any of the movies or the comic books we've all seen. That was very much a part of our concept from the beginning. We went in with the assumption our audience had seen all the movies and read all the comic books, and were maybe bored with the same old thing."

As well as establishing the rules of the Mystery Men's world and their characters' motivation, the concept suggested genre-bending possibilities and started to define the project's sense of humor. "We were hoping maybe we could do what SCREAM did to horror movies," said Levin, "to approach our story with a certain amount of self-awareness while still being sincere. We were not making a spoof."

The first specific concern

was how to choose characters from the original comic. This was not a tidy Fantastic Four, or even an amorphous Justice League of America; Burden's Mysterymen were a fluctuating wild bunch that occasionally included characters even more bizarre than their Carrot leader. The film could not possibly contain them all. "We made a decision very early on to keep it less broad than the comic book suggested," said Levin. "There was a certain level of fantasy in Bob's comic which we wanted to avoid." It was eventually decided aliens and the Carrot would have to wait for sequels in favor of Burden's more terrestrial, unnatural juxtapositions with their trademark offbeat wit.

Gordon, Levin and Richardson brought their pitch to Universal, and the studio decided they wanted to develop a script based on the material. Levin recalled an offbeat genre script that had caught his eye. PLUTO NASH, a comedy about a night-club owner fighting for his rights on a lunar colony in 2087, currently in development for Eddie Murphy with Castle Rock at Warner Bros., was written by Neil Cuthbert, whose only previous genre credits included HOCUS POCUS and RETURN OF SWAMP THING. Levin saw the potential. "Neil wrote from the point of view of genuine heart. We were all sure that he was capable of writing MYSTERY MEN as a comedy about wannabes and losers, without being condescending



Greg Kinnear stars as Captain Amazing, Champion City's beloved superhero in a big-budget adaptation of the Dark Horse comic book created by Bob Burden.

towards them. He was able to avoid parody, but yet still make a comedy, and that was a fine line."

The *MYSTERY MEN* screenplay evolved into a tale of a group of errant crime-fighters with homespun costumes and dubious powers who inhabited a superhero metropolis, Champion City, patrolled by the heroic Captain Amazing. When evil mastermind Casanova Frankenstein effects his own release from the Erie Asylum for the Criminally Insane, Amazing disappears and the Mystery Men are left to save the day. Further drafts would follow, with revisions also supplied by a second screenwriter, Brent Forrester, veteran of *THE BEN STILLER SHOW* and *THE STUPIDS*. "When we cast Ben Stiller, we made a decision to slightly change the Mr. Furious character," Levin recalled. "Brent was brought in to do it, and that had a kind of ripple effect on the rest of the script."

Stiller would eventually become a leading player in the *MYSTERY MEN*, but the popular comedian first considered a very different role. "Ben at one point was going to direct the script," said Levin. "When he decided he

didn't have enough time to devote to the project as a director, we approached him about another character and then we just kept re-approaching him about Mr. Furious."

The director's role was filled by Kinka Usher, a filmmaker new to the feature film arena, whose exotic moniker is a childhood nickname bestowed by his siblings—that stuck. Usher honed his story-telling skills at his Santa Monica-based production company, House of Usher, producing and directing advertising spots for Pepsi, "Got Milk" and Nissan, most notably perhaps in a spot where a Wil Vinton stop-motion animated G.I. Joe shanghai's Bar-

"We created a world where the whole superhero mythology was embraced. The costumes had to be believable so they didn't make our heroes look like buffoons."

bie from her floozy Ken to go "Enjoy the Ride" as only G.I. Joe knows how.

With a director aboard, the cast was not long to follow. "The response to the script from the acting community was very positive," said Levin. "Geoffrey Rush was the first character cast, filling the role of our villain Casanova Frankenstein. Geoffrey basically pursued us, he was very eager to be in our project, so that was a really great way to begin. I think ultimately we attracted a very independent film-type cast." Rush was followed by William H. Macy, Claire Forlani, Janeane Garofalo, Hank Azaria, Tom Waits, Paul Reubens, Kel Mitchell, Greg Kinnear, and finally Ben Stiller.

Cuthbert's screenplay took shape under Usher's influence. "Early on I felt the story didn't have the sophistication that I was looking for," commented Usher. "It was too broad. I tend to go for a much more British-style of comedy, which is drier and more based on situation and character than delivering the next joke." Usher had American referents for style. "I used CITIZEN KANE, visually, and then probably RAISING ARIZONA, comedically." As pre-production began, Usher turned to visual effects designers at Pacific

Ocean Post, long-time collaborators from his commercial work, to begin development of Champion City, while production designer Kirk Petrucelli (*BLADE*) was recruited to assimilate the visual plan.

Wardrobe designer Marilyn Vance (*STREETS OF FIRE*) adopted an approach that grounded the characters in their own reality. "We really had to play with the idea that these were people who dreamed about being superheroes, but they didn't really have the resources to pull it off," noted Levin. "We had to make their costumes credible from the point of view of their characters and their situations, but we also had to avoid making them look silly. We were creating a world where the whole superhero mythology was embraced, and the costumes had to be believable so they didn't make our heroes look like buffoons."

The fusion of past and present became a visual motif in the design of the Mystery Men's world. "The idea was to create a universe that spoke to the future but used elements from the past and from other places," said Levin. "Champion City became this intense mélange, of which took on its own sensibility, with a very Euro-Asian feel. There was also real neo-baroque influence, based on the 19th-century Spanish architect, Gaudi, especially for our villains."

SUPERMAN had Metropolis, based on New York City; BATMAN had Gotham City, based on Chicago; DICK TRACEY had Chester Gould's Detroit—Usher planned to break the trend. "A lot of superhero films have used American backgrounds. What I wanted was to create much more of a global feeling for *MYSTERY MEN*. I wanted to make sure there was a sense

Facing Frankenstein (l to r): Garofalo, Invisible Boy Kel Mitchell, Wes Studi as the Sphynx, Macy, Hank Azaria as the Blue Raja, Ben Stiller as Mr. Furious and Reubens.



THE SPECIALS

Slice of life superhero comedies now a trend.

By Dennis Fischer

Poised to cash-in on the success of *THE MYSTERY MEN* is *THE SPECIALS*, from Mindfire Entertainment, the independent that launched *FREE ENTERPRISE* in June. The superhero spoof starring Rob Lowe and described as *BATMAN* meets *THIS IS SPINAL TAP*, began filming last December, only two months after the start of *THE MYSTERY MEN* and is scheduled for release later this year. Also on the drawing board: *THE UNRELIABLES*, a pilot for the Fox Network written and directed by Ed Solomon which follows a group of retired superheroes in a small town; and *MILLION DOLLAR HEROES*, a feature in development at New Line Cinema from Scott Mitchell Rosenberg's Platinum Studios, about two rival comic book artists who take on the guises of their superhero creations.

The titular heroes of *THE SPECIALS* are a rag-tag team of below third-rate superheros, who are known as the sixth or seventh greatest superhero team in the world. The film concentrates on what these heroes do when they are not fighting supervillains, saving lives, and combating natural disasters. *THE SPECIALS* is the brainchild of writer-performer James Gunn (*TROMEO AND JULIET*, and no relation to the science fiction writer-professor).

Gunn was inspired to write a comedy about superheros by Alan Moore's work on *The Watchmen* and by his love of the genre. There have been a few recent witty animated send-ups of superheros (notably *THE TICK* and *EARTHWORM JIM*), but Gunn was interested in an approach that would

take these people of outlandish ability and treat them seriously. Thus the members of the Specials find themselves consumed by petty bickering, intragroup love affairs, financial squabbles, and misguided attempts to improve their public profile.

Exploring how superheros might really regard a world eager to exploit their reputation and likenesses for profit, Gunn has three members of the team, the Strobe (Thomas Haden Church of *GEORGE OF THE JUNGLE*), the Weevil (Rob Lowe), and Amok (Jamie Kennedy of *SCREAM*) signing a deal with a toy conglomerate for action figure dolls based on their likenesses. Other members of the team include Ms. Indestructible (Paget Brewster), the Strobe's errant wife; Power Chick (Kelly Coffield); Deadly Girl (Judy Greer); Nightbird (Jordan Ladd); Minute (as in small) Man (Gunn himself), Alien Orphan (Gunn's brother Sean); U.S. Bill (Mike Schwartz); and Mr. Smart (Jim Zulevic).

Craig Mazin, who was a one-time director of film marketing

The Great Strobe (Thomas Hayden Church) saves a nursing home from the evil anal slug, from Mindfire Entertainment, the makers of *FREE ENTERPRISE*.



U.S. Bill (Michael Schwartz) activates a bomb recovered from the Hyperion galaxy in *THE SPECIALS*, another upcoming spoof about not so superheroes.

at Disney and is the scriptwriter of the space comedy *ROCKET-MAN* (which he repudiates because of directorial alterations), makes his directorial debut with *THE SPECIALS*.

"The good thing about this comedy is that it's not the sort of comedy where it's schtick, it's very straight, fairly deadpan, so it drifts almost in and out of a dramatic feel, so hopefully people will forgive the claustrophobic limitations of our budget and our schedule."

Mazin likened his approach to the film to what James L. Brooks achieved in *AS GOOD AS IT GETS*. Noted Mazin, "He said he didn't want the characters to have an arc; he wanted the audience to have an arc. He wanted the characters to stay the same and the audience to change their minds slowly about the characters. In this film, that is sort of what I'm trying to do as well, have the au-

dience start to realize that they are not just superheros, but they are humans like us, and then at the very end, once they have completely forgotten that these people are actually superheros, remind them in one final shot that they are different, above us all."

Mazin feels that most recent efforts have betrayed the appeal of the comic genre. Comic book readers take their comics seriously and do not like to see them camped-up or made silly. Said Mazin, "It really is about subverting this bizarre perversion of the superhero genre that's taken place over the last ten years, which is turning superheros, in the '80s at least, into this overcampy, homoerotic Broadway show. If you go back to the great characters, even Superman, there is this dark, twisted, freakish 'we don't belong' thing that goes through the whole genre. The X Men is sort of the whole apotheosis of that theory, and then the first *BATMAN* got close to it. The *Watchmen* is like the hallmark of the kind of thing we're going for here, and then Hollywood just went nutty."

"At some point, the returns just trickled down. This last *BATMAN* movie was a travesty. They didn't do very well, and just as the horror genre got really stupid, *SCREAM* came along and kicked it in its ass. We're trying to be to the superhero genre what *SCREAM* was to the horror genre. We're trying to revive what has become a fairly stupid, predictable genre." □

of other parts of the world, although everyone speaks English. The film is probably an amalgam of San Francisco and Hong Kong, very gritty, with a tremendous Asian influence in the music and graphics and seneage in the streets, with a lot of European cars driving around."

Usher and Petrucelli also strove to use their production design to dislocate the city's sense of time. "We combined a range of periods from the twenties to the seventies. Some scenes look very forties, others look very twenties, all suggested by different types of cars and wardrobe and makeup and hair. As you watch the film it's visually very interesting. It's really a blend of all these influences."

An 80-day shoot was planned starting October 23, 1998, with Brian DePalma's current favorite director of photography, Stephen Burum (*SNAKE EYES*), lensing Usher's feature debut. One of the boldest visual decisions for *MYSTERY MEN*, atypical of the recent glut of superhero movies, was to shoot exteriors on practical locations in and around metropolitan Los Angeles, enhancing and dropping in the digitally created Champion City skyline for an estimated 60% of the picture. "The sets for Casanova's home were built on huge stages and on the backlot," said Levin. "All the action with our heroes, where they live, where they work, were all filmed on location, which was Kinka and Kirk's idea, which Stephen Burum supported. I think it grounds the film and draws our audience a lot closer to the characters." It has been over 20 years since Richard Donner first took Christopher Reeve out onto the streets of New York in his red cape and boots for *SUPERMAN THE MOVIE*. It was a vibrancy that Levin hoped to catch on screen in *MYSTERY MEN*.

Despite the visual sophistication, with Rhythm and Hues joining Pacific Ocean Post to add to the expanding roster of digital effects supervised by Lori Nelson, *MYSTERY MEN* remained a character piece for Usher. "I've made tremendous amounts of commercials be-

"The Mystery Men throw forks, and beat up people up with shovels. They don't fly and can't make themselves skinny. They're much more practical superheroes."



Commercials director Kinka Usher (r) rehearses the Mystery Men at home (l to r) Stiller, Macy, Azaria, Garofalo, Mitchell and Reubens, keeping the humor real.

fore with large effects budgets," the director stated. "The problem with effects is that they tend to divest the story of its humanity, and the humanity of this story was the most important aspect of the project for me. The effects purely supported the idea. The Mystery Men's tasks were very dubious. They throw forks and beat people up with shovels, they don't fly, they can't make themselves really skinny—they're much more practical superheroes."

The real thrill for Usher came from his collaboration with his performers. "The thing about good actors is that they shepherd themselves. They make the film better because they ask really tough questions about why they're doing something, and every time they asked these questions, they made the film better."

Some of the biggest laughs on set came from Greg Kinnear. "I first thought Greg was kind of a dolt," Usher stated. "I cast him because I thought that was perfect for Captain Amazing. When I started working with him as an actor he was wonderful! A superb performer! Great

instincts. A lot of the actors interpreted their characters in interesting ways because they were also writers. We had a lot of scenes with free movement where we would improvise lines, which was very, very helpful in bringing the characters to life."

Enthusiastic studio response allowed last minute additions, inserting city backgrounds where none were originally planned, but the overall effect has taken everyone by surprise. "From the earliest days when Kinka was involved with the project, he brought this film to a level which was beyond anything that I had imagined."

The film has been an interesting experiment for Usher. "I think we've created a different kind of movie, an entertaining movie based on characters and their experiences, not based on the classic Hollywood hooks, sex and violence. I'm very pleased that I was allowed the opportunity to make a movie like that, without any studio interference, with really almost total freedom to design the characters and the visual aspects of the film as I chose. The

film is on a massive scale, but there are definitely edgy, subversive tones to it. It's like I've made an independent picture within the studio system with a studio-sized budget, but the film has a little independent heart to it."

Levin gave pause to consider the implications of his maverick underdog's potential amongst the summer's boxoffice high-rollers. "Comic books are much more interesting and complex than the standard knee-jerk movie industry will give them credit for," he stated. "I think a lot of filmmakers are really starting to recognize that—I don't necessarily think a lot of movie executives are—but I think that some of the more interesting literature in the last couple of decades has been based on graphic novels. There's a synergy. There's this tremendous dialogue going on between comic books and movies."

Levin quoted *THE MATRIX* as a recent example of the cross-over. The Wachowski Brother's recent boxoffice smash tapped the comic gestalt by employing extensive pre-visualizations by comic artist Paul Darrow. This was the tip of the iceberg as far as Levin was concerned. "There are so many movies I've seen that are influenced by Frank Miller's work. Not even comic book movies, but some of Oliver Stone's work, for instance," he observed. If further evidence were needed, Gordon and Levin's next Dark Horse project, *HELLBOY*, currently being written and directed by Guillermo Del Toro, from a magnificent graphic novel by Mike Mignola, should turn a few heads in the summer of 2000. But then again, it all comes down to story.

"One of my favorite things about *MYSTERY MEN*, even though it's a real trip visually and it's a lot of fun, is the theme," said Levin. "Dare to dream the dream that you want to dream, and have the courage to pursue those dreams, no matter what anyone has to say." For Levin, Usher, Burden and the cast and crew behind *MYSTERY MEN*, it has certainly been a sentiment they have been proud to follow. □

STIR OF ECHOES

David Koepp on filming Richard Matheson's

By Peter Sobczynski

You hear about it on the news all the time. Some guy goes to a garage sale and buys a musty old violin for \$20. He takes it home, cleans it up and discovers that he has purchased a priceless Stradivarius. The same thing happened to noted screenwriter David Koepp (*JURASSIC PARK*, *SNAKE EYES*). One day, he went off in search of books to read, instead, he came home with his latest film project, a big-screen adaptation of Richard Matheson's novel *The Stir of Echoes*. Artisan Entertainment opens the film in theaters in September.

Ah, the glamour of filmmaking.

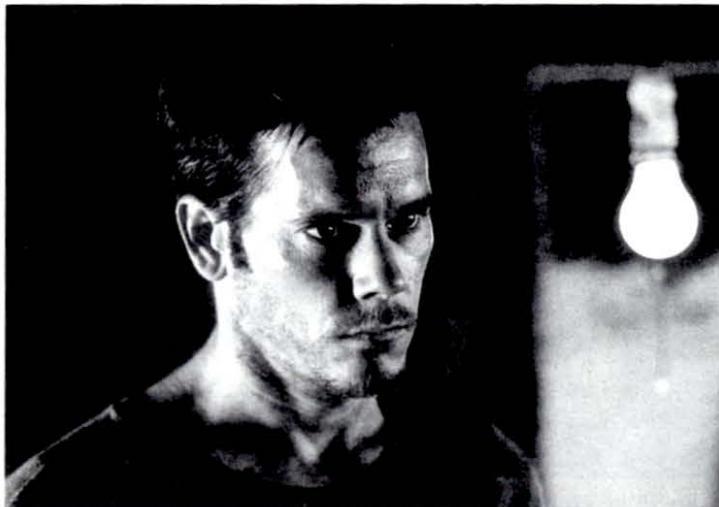
"I've always liked Matheson," Koepp said during a short break on the set of the film that he has not only adapted, but is directing as well, his first such turn since 1995's *THE TRIGGER EFFECT*. "DUEL, I think, is fantastic, such a great script. It's one of those elemental stories that is so simple and clean and perfect. *I AM LEGEND*, I love and *WHAT DREAMS MAY COME*. I've read most of his stuff. I really dug him."

"I was in Vagabond Books in L.A., a great science fiction and fantasy bookstore. I was in there looking around and saw this little book of his that I hadn't heard of before. The guy at the store said, 'Oh, you've gotta read *The Stir of Echoes*.' I read it and I loved it."

The film tells the story of Tom Witzky and his family, wife Maggie and his young son Jake. One night at a party, Tom allows himself to be hypnotized by his sister-in-law. However, a post-hypnotic suggestion seems to be releasing a subconscious power in Tom. Gradually, he becomes obsessed by the visions unfolding before him, and by the sense that there is an otherworldly presence in the house.

Is Tom going crazy? Do these visions have anything to do with the invisible friend that Jake has begun talking to? Does this have anything to do with a grim neighborhood secret involving a "missing" girl named Samantha?

Toplining the cast of Koepp's film, one of the first in-house productions from Artisan



Kevin Bacon stars as a man who discovers a subconscious power to sense the spirit world, an effective shocker from the screenwriter of *JURASSIC PARK*.

san (who have released the genre head-turners *PI* and *THE BLAIR WITCH PROJECT*), are Kevin Bacon (*FOOTLOOSE*) as Tom, and Kathryn Erbe (*WHAT ABOUT BOB?*) as Maggie. Co-starring are Illeana Douglas (*TO DIE FOR*), Kevin Dunn (*SNAKE EYES*), and Liza Weil (*WHATSOEVER*). Making his debut as Jake, the son, is Zachary David Cope.

"Casting is like dating," Koepp remarked. "You go meet each other and sometimes you like each other right away and other times you hate each other right away. Sometimes you ease into it. I think with Kevin and I, we had a real rapport about who we thought the guy was. It's been a great experience with him so far."

"He's a guy who is pretty much an ordinary guy," said Bacon about Tom. "He used to play music, but he had to give up that dream when his wife got pregnant. I liked the guy's story and the story of his family. If you took out all the ghosts and mystery and the horror, it was still an interesting character."

One element of the character hit home for Bacon—the musical part. Bacon, of course, also plays in his own band The Bacon Brothers as a sideline gig. "It wasn't even my idea. It was Dave's idea. I think he had me being, I don't know, an engineer or something originally. He called me up one day and said, 'Maybe we should take advantage of this other side.' It's good because it gave me more to relate to and a little more focus about who he was."

Even though Bacon has become a familiar face in genre films (*APOLLO 13*, *FLATLINERS*, *TREMORS*, *FRIDAY THE 13TH*), he admitted to not being familiar with the novel beforehand. "I'm not much of a reader, frankly. For *APOLLO 13*, I read Jim Lovell's book. You can sometimes get some interesting stuff but this time I just stuck to the script."

For a man who has written the screenplays for some of the most successful effects-heavy films in recent years, it is ironic that Koepp is now working extensively with the most unpredictable effect of all, namely a six-year-old child, Zachery David Cope. It's not that the kid

is a troublemaker; it's just that he is a typical six-year-old with the attendant attention span.

"It's really tough," Koepp admitted. "You just buy a ticket and take your chances. I have a four-year-old at home, so I know some of the terrain of dealing with little kids. It's a trade-off. You get their wonderful, spontaneous moments that just break your heart. You also get an enormous amount of inconsistency. He's six. Hitting a mark is difficult to do. Matching is a nightmare. If you just sit back, and are willing to burn some film and let it keep rolling, you eventually wind up with beautiful little moments that you can cut into your film."

Zachery, on the other hand, is completely at ease. A veteran of television commercials, he now has plans to conquer the silver screen. "I've already begun to write my film," he exclaimed. "It's about a powerful family mostly. It's like a different version of *POWER RANGERS*. I'll be in it and David is going to direct it for me."

Even more exciting, *A STIR OF ECHOES* will also be the first R-rated movie that he has been allowed to see. He admitted that the ghosts in *GHOSTBUSTERS* scared him, but that was when he was younger.

The more conventional special effects on the film are being put together by the group Banned From the Ranch, whose work has been seen in *TITANIC* and *MEN IN BLACK*. Among the effects that they are currently working on are various apparitions

obscure book.

tions, cold-breath replications and one thing lying around backstage that I wouldn't dream of revealing.

"Much of what we are working on is 'Samantha' and her ghostly qualities, I guess is the best way to define it," said Ranch hand Casey Cannon. "We had several discussions about the approach to these visual effects and how they should thematically be woven throughout the story and yet not speak too loudly. The goal was that the effects be subtle, yet photo realistic enough that they imply a certain aesthetic quality to Samantha and set her apart from what we normally perceive as a normal-looking human being."

Even though the filmmakers are going for a more subtle touch, this will not be a horror movie where all involved say that it is everything but, according to Koepp. "I will proudly say that it is a horror movie. However, it is not a slasher movie. That has sort of become a blurred issue in the last couple of years because of those notable films that have done so well. They have a great audience, a big audience, but they don't scare me. They surprise me. Someone jumps out and says 'BOO' and that makes me jump in my seat."

"I've always been more attracted to the kinds of movies that get under your skin a little more. What to me is the scariest is not that the monster will catch me and kill me, because if he kills me, it's over. What scares me is that the monster will chase me, catch me and disappear and then I'll start to turn into him. That's the thing that freaks me out; that I'm changing or that someone I love is changing and there is nothing I can do about it."

"I'm trying to do something a little more disturbing. I think that it is a horror movie in the classic sense, not like contemporary horror has become. I think it is going to stick with you a little longer and there are a few scenes that I hope will sort of bother people for days after they see the movie. That's my goal."

What does Koepp hope that audiences will take away from STIR OF ECHOES when they finally see it? "I hope they come away with the feeling that horror has limitless possibilities. That a horror movie can present characters that you have some real feeling for and real understanding of and it can still scare the living shit out of you!" □



After a bout with hypnosis, Bacon grapples with whether his bizarre "visions" are real or imagined.

CLASSIC HORROR

Koepp shocks with Matheson's psychic murder mystery thriller.

In this age of hybrid horror films (romantic-horror, comedy-horror, adventure-horror) the straight-out, old-fashioned horror film was starting to look like something of a lost art. It is a genuine pleasure, therefore, to report that David Koepp's sophomore directing effort, *A STIR OF ECHOES*, is a horror film that emphasizes horror—not romance, comedy, or adventure. Working from Richard Matheson's novel (more or less a psychic murder mystery), Koepp has crafted a screenplay that diverges from its source but retains the essential premise and set-up, resulting in a solid storyline set in a believably realistic world where the sudden intrusion of the supernatural is that much more uncanny. (This is the kind of stuff Stephen King was talking about when he called Richard Matheson one of his biggest influences: horror set not in far off Transylvania but in your own neighborhood.)

In a nutshell, Kevin Bacon's working class Joe awakens from a hypnosis session at a party with new-found psychic powers, and comes to realize that his young son's imaginary playmate is not imaginary after all. The increasingly disturbing ghostly visions compel him to seek out the source of this haunting, while his obsession with the mystery threatens to destroy his marriage. The ever increasing intrusion of the supernatural element into the everyday lifestyle is expertly handled, with a few early hints leading up to a first full revelation guaran-

teed to send you leaping out of your seat in startled shock. With the comfort barrier torn down, Koepp is thenceforward able to play off our anticipation of yet another big shock, teasing with shadows and unexpected arrivals but never delivering in quite the same way because he doesn't need to. Instead, he opts for a growing sense of dread as the horrible truth behind the haunting comes to light.

Along the way, some narrative threads remain untied (a pregnancy is introduced and then forgotten); the story morphs into a somewhat more conventional thriller as the focus shifts from the ghost to her murderers; and the conclusion relies on a bit of a cinematic cheat (a presumably dead character returns to save the day but if he wasn't dead, why did he take so long?). But even these flaws never undermine the suspense of the film itself (although they may nag at you on the way home).

After the competent but uninspired *THE TRIGGER EFFECT*, David Koepp has taken a great step forward as a director. Aided by solid performances all around, and augmented with a judicious use of special effects that are actually creepy rather than just technically impressive, he has managed to generate some genuine scares in the course of telling an interesting story peopled with engaging characters. This, rather than the cop-out comedy of the recent teen slasher cycle, represents a real resurgence.

Steve Biodrowski

REVIEWS

CINEMA: After the hype, some genre films with bite.

By Steve Blodrowski

After clearing a path for the over-anticipated STAR WARS prequel, THE PHANTOM MENACE, rival studios rolled out a variety of other summer science fiction fare that, while not as highly hyped, often proved far more entertaining.

LAKE PLACID (Sony, 7/99, R) is the next step in the evolutionary process that led from JAWS to ANACONDA. With its colossal crocodile having migrated to an unlikely climate, and with heavy doses of humor, the film could have been a real disaster. Surprise to say, the result is actually, by turns, both scary and funny—although seldom at the same time. Credit the schizophrenic nature to the weird combo of having Steve Miner (FRIDAY THE 13TH 2 and 3) direct a script by David E. Kelley (creator of ALLY MCBEAL). With its gory killing in a backwoods lake, the direction often revives memories of Jason and Camp Crystal Lake; while the writing enlivens the usual exposition scenes and stock characters (the local sheriff, the scientist, etc.) with humor that makes the film fun to watch even when the monster is off-screen. The problem is that many people who would enjoy the laughs might not want to sit through the severed limbs and decapitations. Also, an attempt to invest the beast with mythic power falls flat (the film is too lightweight to support anything so heavy), and a last-minute attempt to inspire sympathy and respect for the defeated monster works about as well as a similar goof-up in last year's GODZILLA. That said, the film is nevertheless entertaining, but if you want a really excellent alligator-on-the-loose movie, check out 1980's ALLIGATOR, penned by John Sayles. The mix of humor and horror is balanced far better.

AUSTIN POWERS: THE SPY WHO SHAGGED ME (New Line, 6/99, PG-13) falls prey to one pitfall of sequels: the new story (a time travel premise has Austin return to his beloved '60s era) hasn't nearly the overall potential of the first film's fish-out-of-water approach, so the sequel works more on a scene-by-scene basis, and sometimes it seems as if those scenes have been contrived merely to repeat situations from the first film. On the other hand, one could argue that the film is doing a parody of the conventions apparent in most sequels, playing off audience expectations by doing variations on familiar material. In any case, most of what was good the first time around is back, and many of the new gags are hysterically funny. The film deserves some kind of credit for having Austin Powers (Mike Myers, very funny) drive himself cross-eyed while trying to resolve the time travel



Stan Winston's monstrous crocodile goes on a feeding frenzy in LAKE PLACID, an erratic but entertaining horror-comedy in the JAWS/ANACONDA sub-genre.

paradox, which leads to Basil Exposition (Michael York) telling him—and the audience—to forget all that and just enjoy the ride. Also, two montage sequences exhaust almost every euphemism for "penis:" every time someone is about to say the word, the film cuts to a new scene beginning with someone saying "Willie" to Willie Nelson or "Woody" to Woody Harrelson, which then leads to another scene, and another, until you think the sequence can't possibly build anymore—and then, amazingly, it does. A very clever use of the cinematic form to create something genuinely funny out of a joke that could have been merely juvenile.

Amazingly, TARZAN (Disney 6/99, G) actually captures some elements of the Edgar Rice Burroughs' novel, *Tarzan of the Apes*, that have eluded previous cinematic adaptations. Not that it's an altogether faithful filmization, but fans of the book are likely to spot many familiar elements. Unfortunately, the film stops short of being a truly well-realized adult adventure story. Sure, the songs are pushed into the background, and there is a legitimate attempt to portray the dangers of the jungle, but this is still a film that keeps the family (read: kiddie) audience clearly in mind. Especially annoying are the early animal antics on view when Tarzan is still a young boy; the comic relief from his ape and elephant friends is somewhat misplaced in this movie—sort of a residue of the Disney tradition (comic relief side-kicks) that just won't fade away. On the other hand, once Tarzan grows up, this intrusive kind of humor is supplanted by a more organic kind that grows out of the Ape Man's interaction with the humans who find him. Plus, the exciting action kicks in. In the end, Burroughs' tale has been softened up for family consumption, but not beyond recognition. And the usual Disney devices (e.g., death of a parent) still tug effectively at the heart strings.

The third time is definitely not the charm for THE THIRTEENTH

FLOOR (Sony, 5/99, R), the third cyberspace film to reach screens this year. Whereas THE MATRIX used its premise as an excuse for outrageously entertaining action sequences, and EXISTENZ probed the deeper question of what really constitutes reality, THIRTEEN FLOOR is awash in a noir aesthetic that is interesting to watch but ultimately empty and often misguided (for example, the 1937 virtual world is painted in drab tones to suggest a faded past, but the soaring music score keeps telling us how gloriously beautiful it all is).

The story is more or less a rehash of the far superior DARK CITY: a lead character with memory problems is pursued by the police for a murder, and while seeking to exonerate himself, he finds that his world is actually an artificial construct. The plot moves along just quick enough to hold attention, but if you pay attention you'll be a step ahead of the surprise twist (not only is 1937 a virtual reality, so is the present day), and when it's all over, you'll be wondering why you should care about any of it. One amusing (and presumably accidental) point: Gretchen Mol is unimpressive as a seductively mysterious woman from Europe, but when her character's virtual personality emerges (a white trash check-out clerk at a supermarket), she suddenly seems appealing and attractive.

Finally, we have the American Cinematheque to thank for a chance to view Shinya Tsukamoto's HIRUKO (THE GOBLIN) on the big screen at the newly renovated Egyptian Theatre in Hollywood. Fans of the writer-directors TETSUO films will see many of the same stylistic quirks on display, but the story is actually far more linear and understandable. Copying familiar elements from John Carpenter's THE THING and THE EVIL DEAD 2, the film is a roller-coaster horror opus filled with surprises, outrageous effects, and disturbing incongruities (i.e. a severed head singing a beautiful, haunting melody). Find it on video, if you can. □

Obituary

DeForest Kelley

DeForest Kelley, known to STAR TREK fans around the world as Dr. Leonard "Bones" McCoy, died after a lengthy illness at the age of 79 on Friday, June 11, 1999, at the Motion Picture and Television Fund Hospital in Woodland Hills, California. His wife of almost 55 years, Carolyn, was in the adjacent room, hospitalized with a broken leg.

The son of a Baptist minister, Kelley wanted to become a physician, but finances prevented him from undertaking the training. Instead, he turned to acting. He first appeared in the movie FEAR IN THE NIGHT in 1947. During the following years, he often appeared in Westerns on television and in feature films, including GUNFIGHT AT THE O.K. CORRAL. In the 1960s, Gene Roddenberry cast him in POLICE STORY, a pilot (also featuring Grace Lee Whitney, TREK's Janice Rand) that never made it to television. Although he did not appear in the two STAR TREK pilots, once the show made it on the air, Kelley joined the cast as the salty but lovable Dr. McCoy.

Kelley brought a warm humanity to the role, often serving as a foil to the Vulcan Spock (Leonard Nimoy). During the three-year run of the original series, the relationship between McCoy, Captain Kirk (William Shatner), and Spock developed into a very special one. Along with his co-stars, he reprised his role for six STAR TREK feature films. Kelley also helped pass the torch to THE NEXT GENERATION by appearing as a very elderly Admiral McCoy in the debut episode, "Encounter at Farpoint."

Kelley was beloved by coworkers and fans alike. Said Nimoy after receiving the news of Kelley's death, "His job was to bring humanity to STAR TREK. He had the humanist point of view in the show. It fit him very well. He was a decent, loving, caring partner and will be deeply missed."

His health had been poor for a number of years. The last time I saw him, at the Creation's Grand Slam Convention in 1997, he looked frail, but happy to see his fans. He was scheduled to appear at the same convention in 1999, but was already hospitalized.

At the time of Kelley's death, interview clips of him could be seen in the movie TREKKIES, a documentary about TREK fans that was playing across the country. Dr. McCoy's signature lines, "He's dead, Jim," and "I'm a doctor, not a bricklayer," will never be forgotten. In fact, Kelley joked that the line "He's dead, Jim," would be written on his tombstone.

Anna L. Kaplan





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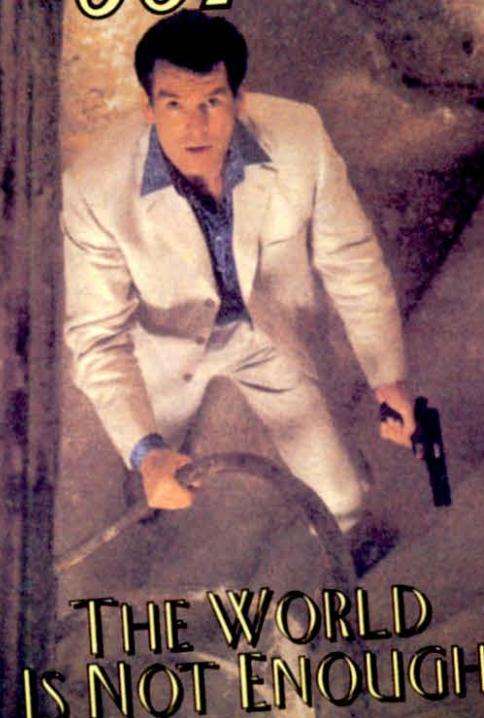
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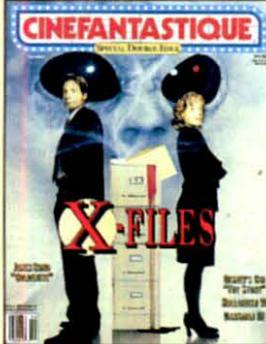
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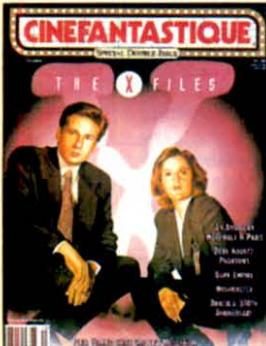
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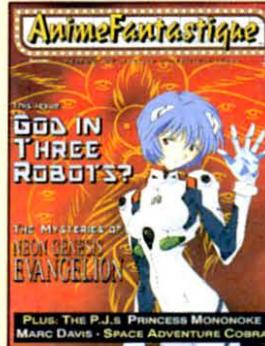
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